

THE RISING NEPAL

ALL BE HAPPY, ALL BE WELL

Yoga and meditation should be adopted as a way of life: PM



PHOTO: KABIN ADHIKARI/TRN
Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli participating in Yoga and Meditation organised in the capital on the occasion of World Meditation Day on Saturday.

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 21

PRIME MINISTER KP SHARMA OLI HAS SAID THAT YOGA AND MEDITATION MUST BE ADOPTED AS A WAY OF LIFE TO MAKE THE WORLD, WHICH IS AFFLICTED WITH WAR AND UNREST, PEACEFUL.

ADDRESSING A PROGRAMME ORGANISED BY THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD MEDITATION DAY, 2024, AT THE ARMY PAVILION IN TUNDIKHEL ON SATURDAY, PRIME MINISTER OLI EMPHASISED THAT PEACE WOULD NOT BE ACHIEVED IN THE WORLD BY USING WEAPONS IN RETURN FOR WEAPONS.

HE URGED PEOPLE TO EMBRACE MEDITATION AND YOGA WITH POSITIVE THINKING.

PRIME MINISTER OLI SAID THAT PHYSICAL AND MENTAL MEDITATION SHOULD BE PRACTICED REGULARLY WITH A CIVILIZED CULTURE AND POSITIVE THINKING, AND THIS KNOWLEDGE SHOULD BE PASSED ON TO SCHOOLS AND THE NEW GENERATION.

HE POINTED OUT THAT MEDITATION, USED BY CONSCIOUS HUMAN BEINGS IN A NATURAL WAY, HAS BEEN THE ORIGIN OF CIVILISATION.

HE ALSO MENTIONED THAT IT IS NECESSARY TO INTEGRATE MEDITATION AND YOGA REGULARLY TO FULFILL THE GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO MAKING THE COUNTRY A HEALTHY NEPAL. "WE MUST LEAD A HEALTHY LIFE BY MAINTAINING A PROPER DIET AND

LIFESTYLE. THE AIM SHOULD BE TO AVOID FALLING SICK AND NEEDING HOSPITAL TREATMENT," SAID PRIME MINISTER OLI.

"WE ALL MUST WORK TOGETHER TO BUILD A HEALTHY AND PEACEFUL WORLD. I HAVE ALSO TAKEN NOTE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTING MEDITATION AND YOGA ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT. LETTING GO OF SELFISHNESS AND FOCUSING ON CONCENTRATION IS THE SOLUTION TO EVERY PROBLEM." DURING THE PROGRAMME, SWAMI ANAND ARJUN, SANTOSH KEDIA, AND LP BHANU SHARMA DEMONSTRATED VARIOUS MEDITATION PRACTICES.

Country making advances on different fronts: PM Oli

MEANWHILE, OUR ITAHARI CORRESPONDENT ADDS: PRIME MINISTER OLI HAS SAID THAT THE COUNTRY IS ADVANCING IN SEVERAL AREAS FOLLOWING THE CHANGES IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM. ADDRESSING THE INAUGURAL CEREMONY OF THE 51ST NATIONAL CONVENTION OF NEPAL JESUITS IN ITAHARI ON SATURDAY, PRIME MINISTER OLI HIGHLIGHTED THE SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN INFRASTRUCTURE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES BEFORE AND AFTER THE POLITICAL TRANSITION.

"WHAT WE NEED IS THE HAPPINESS OF HUMANITY. THE GOAL OF OUR HARD WORK IS TO ACHIEVE HAPPINESS," SAID PRIME MINISTER OLI. HE EMPHASISED THAT PEOPLE SHOULD BE VALUED BASED ON THEIR KNOWLEDGE, INTELLIGENCE, AND CHARACTER.

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Fans rejoice as Janakpur Bolts emerge NPL champions



PHOTO: BIKASH DWARE/TRN
NPL Grand Finale: Janakpur Bolts celebrating victory after winning NPL title on Saturday.

BY NAYAK PAUDEL
Kathmandu, Dec. 21

JANAKPUR BOLTS BECAME THE CHAMPIONS OF THE INAUGURAL EDITION OF NEPAL PREMIER LEAGUE (NPL) OUTPLAYING SUDURPASHCHIM ROYALS IN THE FINAL PLAYED AT A PACKED TU INTERNATIONAL CRICKET GROUND ON SATURDAY.

SUDURPASHCHIM HAD DEFEATED JANAKPUR TWICE IN THE TOURNAMENT BEFORE THE DUO MET IN THE FINAL. HOWEVER, THE BOLTS DID NOT LOSE IN THE MOST IMPORTANT MATCH AND WENT ON TO LIFT THE NPL TROPHY.

THE GROUND ERUPTED WHEN MATAN YADAV PUSHED THE SECOND BALL OF THE FINAL OVER TOWARDS THE LEG SIDE AND JANAKPUR CHASED 185 RUNS SUCCESSFULLY WITH FOUR BALLS REMAINING.

AFTER THE WIN, JANAKPUR BOLTS

PLAYERS AND STAFF TOOK A LAP OF APPRECIATION AROUND THE GROUND, CLAPPING FOR THE ARRIVING FANS AS A GESTURE OF GRATITUDE FOR THEIR UNWAVERING SUPPORT. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME IN THE NPL THAT SUDUR'S FANS, WHO WERE THE LOUDEST, WERE SILENCED.

A QUEUE OF JANAKPUR FANS FROM THE TU GROUND TO BALKHU CHOWK COULD BE SEEN OBSTRUCTING TRAFFIC AFTER THE FINAL GAME CONCLUDED, CHEERING OVER THE WIN AND CELEBRATING WITH COLOURS LIKE IN HOLI FESTIVAL. HOWEVER, THE CHEERS DID NOT END IN BALKHU, THE FANS WERE LOUD UNTIL THEY REACHED THEIR HOMES.

MEANWHILE, THE NOISE WAS NOT THE LOUDEST AROUND TU CRICKET GROUND BUT AROUND 250 KM AWAY IN JANAKPUR, JANAKPUR BOLTS' HOMETOWN.

LIVE VIDEOS ACROSS SOCIAL MEDIA SHOWED THAT THE STREETS OF JANAKPUR ERUPTED IN JUBILANT CELEBRATIONS AS LOCALS POURED OUT TO MARK THEIR

A queue of Janakpur fans from the TU Ground to Balkhu Chowk could be seen obstructing traffic after the final game concluded, cheering over the win and celebrating with colours like in Holi festival.

TEAM'S HISTORIC NPL VICTORY. FANS WERE RALLYING AROUND JANAKPUR CITY ON MOTORCYCLES AS THOUSANDS GATHERED ON THE JANAKI TEMPLE PREMISES AFTER THE WIN.

"CRICKET HAS HAD A BIG INFLUENCE ON THE LIVES OF THOUSANDS OF YOUTHS IN MADHES. JANAKPUR WAS REPRESENTING THIS REGION IN THE NPL AND I AM HAPPY TO SEE THE TEAM LIFT THE TROPHY AGAINST ALL

ODDS," SAID SUBH MANDAL, A YOUTH FROM BIRGUNJ WHO WORKS IN KATHMANDU.

MANDAL, WITH AROUND A DOZEN OF HIS HOMETOWN FRIENDS, WAS COVERED IN RED COLOUR FOLLOWING A CELEBRATION WHEN HE WALKED TOWARDS BALKHU CHOWK TO TAKE A BUS TO KOTESWAR.

"MY FATHER WAS WATCHING THE FINAL LIVE ON THE TELEVISION ALONGSIDE OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS BACK HOME. BUT WHEN I CALLED HIM AFTER COMING OUT OF THE GROUND TO SHARE THE HAPPINESS, HE WAS NOT AT HOME; HE HAD REACHED THE JANAKI TEMPLE PREMISES TO CELEBRATE WITH THE ENTIRE CITY," SAID BIKASH AGRAWAL, A TEENAGER WHO IS PURSUING HIS +2 EDUCATION IN LAITPUR.

"I AM QUITE IMPRESSED WITH HOW THE NPL BEGAN AND CONCLUDED. I CAME TO WATCH THE OPENING GAME AS WELL. THE WHOLE TOURNAMENT HAD BEEN A ROLLER-COASTER RIDE AS A JANAKPUR BOLTS FAN, BUT IT HAS ENDED WELL," AGRAWAL ADDED.

Govt accelerates e-governance drive with ambitious digital transformation efforts

BY PURUSHOTTAM P. KHATRI
Kathmandu, Dec. 21

UNTIL A FEW YEARS AGO, MANY OF US HAD TO STAND FOR HOURS IN LONG QUEUES ON THE STREETS OF KATHMANDU VALLEY TO APPLY FOR AN IPO OF COMPANIES AND EVEN TO CLAIM THE RIGHT SHARES.

BUT WITH THE CHANGE IN ICT SECTOR AND INITIATIVES TO UPGRADE THIS SYSTEM TO ONLINE, THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE JOINING THE STOCK MARKET HAS INCREASED EXPONENTIALLY.

ACCORDING TO CDS AND CLEARING LIMITED, 6.451 MILLION DE-MAT (DE-MATERIALIZED) ACCOUNTS HAVE BEEN OPENED SO FAR. THE BANKS AND FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS HAVE A SYSTEM IN PLACE TO BUY PRIMARY MARKET SHARES FROM HOME THROUGH THE 'E-ASWA' SYSTEM BROUGHT IN COLLABORATION WITH OTHER BODIES. TRADE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (TMS) HAS ALSO BEEN DEVELOPED FOR BUYING AND SELLING SECURITIES IN THE SECONDARY MARKET.

LIKewise, IT HAS NOW BECOME HISTORY THAT YOU HAD TO BE AT THE COMPANY REGISTRAR OFFICE EITHER TO REGISTER OR TO MAKE AN ANNUAL UPDATE OF THE COMPANY'S STATUS, CARRYING A STACK OF FILES.

THE COMPANY REGISTRATION PROCESS WOULD ONLY BEGIN AFTER YOU SUBMITTED A HEAP OF DOCUMENTS SUCH AS THE LETTER OF ADMINISTRATION, RULES, AND DETAILS OF ALL COMPANY SHAREHOLDERS (IN THE CASE OF A PUBLIC COMPANY), AND PROOF OF CITIZENSHIP OR OTHER DOCUMENTS OF ALL DIRECTORS.

THIS SITUATION HAS NOW ENDED. THE REGISTRATION PROCESS BEGINS AFTER SCANNING THE CERTIFIED DETAILS AND UPLOADING THEM FROM YOUR OWN COMPUTER. THE COMPANY IS REGISTERED AFTER THE CONCERNED OFFICE VERIFIES IT. AFTER REGISTRATION, EVERYTHING FROM COMPANY UPDATES



» TRN SPECIAL

TO ONLINE WORK IS DONE DIGITALLY. HOWEVER, THERE IS STILL A PROVISION TO GO TO THE OFFICE TO GET THE CERTIFICATE OR GET AN UPDATED CERTIFICATE.

THE COMPANY REGISTRAR'S OFFICE HAS ALSO STARTED THE DIGITAL SIGNATURE SYSTEM SINCE LAST JULY. USING IT, A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD CAN PROVIDE HIS/HER AUTHENTICATION BY MEANS OF DIGITAL SIGNATURES.

THIS SYSTEM, IMPLEMENTED VOLUNTARILY, IS BEING PREPARED TO BE MADE MANDATORY IN CASE OF REGISTRATION OF PUBLIC COMPANIES IN THE FIRST PHASE, AND GRADUALLY BE IMPLEMENTED FOR THE REGISTRATION OF PRIVATE COMPANIES, SAID ASSISTANT REGISTRAR BASANTA BAHADUR KHATRI OF THE OFFICE OF THE COMPANY REGISTRAR, TRIPuresHAR.

HE SAID ONCE THIS SYSTEM IS FULLY IMPLEMENTED, SERVICE RECIPIENTS DON'T NEED TO GO TO THE COMPANY OFFICE FOR ANY COMPANY-RELATED WORK.

Progress in e-governance

RAMESH SHARMA PAUDYAL, DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, UNDER THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, SAID, "WE HAVE REALISED THAT SOME IMPORTANT WORKS HAD BEEN DONE IN THE IT AND E-GOVERNANCE PART IN THE LAST DECADE. THIS HAS BROUGHT ABOUT EXTENSIVE IMPROVEMENTS IN THE AREAS OF PUBLIC SERVICES AND PAYMENT SYSTEMS."

THIS IS PROVEN BY THE FACT THAT NEPAL SECURED 119TH POSITION IN THE E-GOVERNMENT DEVELOPMENT INDEX (EGDI) OUT OF ALL UN MEMBER NATIONS SECURING 0.05781 POINT FOR THE YEAR 2024. THIS UPDATE IS BEING MADE IN EVERY TWO YEARS. IN 2022, NEPAL WAS IN 125TH RANK. THE UN E-GOVERNMENT SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS A GLOBAL TREND OF INCREASED INVESTMENT IN DIGITAL GOVERNMENT TECHNOLOGIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE.

ACCORDING TO PAUDYAL, OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, BANKS AND FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS LICENSED BY NEPAL RASTRA BANK

HAVE REVOLUTIONISED MOBILE BANKING SERVICES. THE USE OF 'QR'-BASED PAYMENT FOR CASHLESS TRANSACTIONS HAS INCREASED EXTENSIVELY IN RECENT TIMES.

THIS SYSTEM HAS NOT ONLY REDUCED CASH TRANSACTIONS BUT ALSO PAYMENTS MADE THROUGH DEBIT CARDS AND CREDIT CARDS, HE ADDED.

FOREIGN SWITCHES HAD TO BE USED FOR PAYMENTS MADE THROUGH DEBIT AND CREDIT CARDS, AND MONEY WAS SENT ABROAD FOR EACH TRANSACTION AND THESE HAVE ALSO DECREASED TREMENDOUSLY. HOWEVER, 'QR REVOLUTION' HAS ENDED THE SITUATION OF MONEY FLOWING OUT OF BANKS AND FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN TRANSACTIONS.

THERE IS NO NEED TO GO TO THE RELEVANT PLACE TO MAKE ANY KIND OF PAYMENT, FROM DRINKING WATER, ELECTRICITY, INTERNET, TELEPHONE, TO TAX PAYMENT.

DG PAUDYAL SAID, APART FROM BANKS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY HAS BROUGHT MANY CHANGES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES. MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (MIS) HAS NOW BEEN IMPLEMENTED IN ALMOST ALL GOVERNMENT OFFICES. THIS HAS REDUCED THE TIME TAKEN FOR SERVICE DELIVERY. PAYMENTS BY GOVERNMENT AGENCIES HAVE ALSO GONE TO E-PAYMENT.

HOWEVER, THE HASSLE OF HAVING TO SUBMIT DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY ONE GOVERNMENT AGENCY TO ANOTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCY AND MANUALLY UPLOADING DETAILS, OR SCANNING DOCUMENTS AND UPLOADING THEM STILL EXISTS.

"THE SYSTEM OF HAVING TO UPLOAD THEM REPEATEDLY FROM OFFICE TO OFFICE AND VERIFYING DETAILS MANUALLY IS STILL IN PLACE, HE SAID. WE MUST STOP THIS TREND OF VERIFYING OUR CITIZENSHIP CERTIFICATES ALREADY VERIFIED BY ONE SPECIFIC GOVERNMENT OFFICE BECAUSE WE MUST ACCEPT AND BELIEVE THE CHANGE BROUGHT ABOUT BY IT," SAID PAUDYAL.

DG PAUDYAL SAID THE CONCEPT OF DIGITAL GOVERNANCE THAT HAS COME UP LATELY

IS TO END PUBLIC HASSLE THAT SERVICE RECIPIENTS HAVE TO UNDERGO. "UNTIL NOW, THE IDEA WAS TO USE ICT IN GOVERNMENT SERVICE DELIVERY. NOW ONWARDS, WE WILL MOVE FROM ICT TO IOT (INTERNET OF THINGS), WHICH MEANS DELIVERY OF GOVERNMENT SERVICE TO THE HOUSE OF SERVICE SEEKERS THROUGH THE USE OF INTERNET," HE CLAIMED.

ACCORDING TO HIM, LATELY A CONCEPT HAS DEVELOPED THAT CITIZENS SHOULD NOT GO TO GOVERNMENT OFFICES, BUT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD PROVIDE SERVICES TO THE CITIZENS GIVING ACCESS TO THEIR GADGETS. "WE HAVE STARTED CALLING THIS DIGITAL GOVERNANCE AND TRANSFORMATION FROM E-GOVERNANCE," HE SAID.

ACCORDING TO THE SAME CONCEPT, THE DIGITAL NEPAL FRAMEWORK IS ALSO BEING REVISED BY THE MINISTRY, SAID PAUDYAL.

HE SAID THAT UNTIL NOW GOVERNMENT SERVICES WERE OPERATED ACCORDING TO THE OBJECTIVE OF E-GOVERNANCE. ITS OBJECTIVE WAS TO USE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN GOVERNMENT OFFICE WORK. HOWEVER, PEOPLE HAD TO REACH THE OFFICE PHYSICALLY TO GET THE SERVICES. HE SAID, "THE JOURNEY AHEAD IS TOWARDS DIGITISATION AND DIGITALISATION OF THE PUBLIC SERVICES. THE OBJECTIVE IS NOT REQUIRE PEOPLE TO GO TO GOVERNMENT OFFICES, BUT TO BRING GOVERNMENT SERVICES TO THE HOUSES OF THE PEOPLE."

DG PAUDYAL SAID THE CONCEPT OF INTEGRATING ALL PUBLIC SERVICES THROUGH THE 'NAGARIK APP' LAUNCHED BY THE GOVERNMENT IS EXEMPLARY. HOWEVER, SEVERAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES ARE YET TO BE ENLISTED AND SYNCHRONISED IN THIS APP. ONE GOOD EXAMPLE OF THIS APP, NOW, IS THAT EVERY CITIZEN WHEN GETS LOGGED IN TO THIS APP, CAN EASILY GET THEIR PERSONAL PAN NUMBER WITHIN FEW HOURS JUST BY UPLOADING THEIR CITIZENSHIP CERTIFICATES AND PHOTO AFTER IT GETS VERIFIED BY THE AUTHORITIES.

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EARTHQUAKE DAMAGES 16 HOUSES IN BAJURA

BY SHER BAHADUR SARKI
Bajura, Dec. 21

A 5.2 MAGNITUDE EARTHQUAKE STRUCK THE BAJURA DISTRICT AT 4:14 AM ON SATURDAY, WITH ITS EPICENTRE LOCATED IN GOTRI, JAGANNATH RURAL MUNICIPALITY-5, IN THE NORTHEASTERN PART OF THE DISTRICT, ACCORDING TO THE EARTHQUAKE MONITORING CENTRE IN SURKHET.

WHILE NO HUMAN CASUALTIES HAVE BEEN REPORTED, THE EARTHQUAKE CAUSED SIGNIFICANT STRUCTURAL DAMAGE, LEAVING 16 HOUSES CRACKED AND UNINHABITABLE. MANY OF THESE HOUSES HAD ALREADY BEEN WEAKENED BY A 5.9 MAGNITUDE EARTHQUAKE THAT STRUCK SWAMIKARTIK RURAL MUNICIPALITY LAST YEAR ON 24 JANUARY 2024.

RESIDENTS FLED THEIR HOMES DURING THE TREMOR. LOCAL ANIRAM DAMAI SAID, "THE EARTHQUAKE STRUCK IN THE EARLY MORNING WHILE WE WERE SLEEPING. THE TREMOR SHOOK OUR HOUSE, AND WE IMMEDIATELY RUSHED OUTSIDE FOR SAFETY."

THOUGH NO LIVES WERE LOST, THEIR HOME IS NO LONGER SAFE TO LIVE IN, HE ADDED.

UPON HEARING ABOUT THE EARTHQUAKE, LOCAL AUTHORITIES VISITED THE AFFECTED AREAS ACROSS ALL WARDS OF JAGANNATH RURAL MUNICIPALITY. WARD CHAIRPERSON GAURI SARKI REPORTED SIGNIFICANT STRUCTURAL DAMAGE TO HOUSES BUT CONFIRMED NO HUMAN CASUALTIES.

"WE ARE CURRENTLY COLLECTING DATA ON THE NUMBER OF HOUSES DAMAGED IN GOTRI, BOTH PARTIALLY AND FULLY. ONCE WE HAVE COMPLETE INFORMATION, DISCUSSIONS WILL BE HELD TO DETERMINE WAYS TO PROVIDE RELIEF TO THE VICTIMS," HE SAID.

SUB-INSPECTOR MOHAN BHATTARA FROM THE JUDDI POLICE POST ALSO CONFIRMED PARTIAL DAMAGE TO MOST HOUSES IN GOTRI. "SIXTEEN HOUSES BELONGING TO RESIDENTS LIKE ANIRAM DAMAI, ARI DAMAI, DHARMA DAMAI, GAIKALA DAMAI AND SUPRA SHAHI HAVE BEEN SEVERELY CRACKED," HE SAID.

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BULLION
(Rs. per tola)

Hallmark Gold : Rs. 148,500
Worked Gold : NA
Silver : Rs. 1,760

STOCK

NEPSE : 2,596.82
Total Amount : 4,760,267,483.48
No. of Share : 9,832,308

KMC COMPLETES 43
INFRASTRUCTURE
PROJECTS IN LAST
FIVE MONTHS

RSS
Kathmandu, Dec. 21

The Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) has completed 43 infrastructure projects in the first five months of the current fiscal year starting July 16. The metropolis has asphalted 37.30 kilometres road during this period. Similarly, KMC has constructed 8.40 kilometres road under the Regular Road Repair Programme, 10.20 kilometres road under the Infrastructure Ambulance Programme, 9.40 kilometres under the Dust-free Road Programme and 9.30 kilometres road under the Carry-over Programme during the five months.

KMC Public Works Department Chief Suraj Shakya shared about the current progress of infrastructure projects during the Budget Formulation Committee meeting held on Friday. KMC Deputy Mayor Sunita Dangol presided over the meeting.

Shakya said that along with the black-topping of the roads, 5.80 kilometres roads have been pitched with RCC, drains constructed on 1.16 kilometres road, slabs have been lain on 2,070 square metres of roads. The Department stated that public works with investment of around Rs 880 million have been carried out in the last five months of the current fiscal year.

XIAOMI LAUNCHES
OUTDOOR SPEAKER

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 21

Xiaomi has launched the Xiaomi Sound Outdoor Speaker in Nepal. The device is designed for outdoor use, offering portable audio performance with a durable build.

The speaker features a 30W audio output with dual passive woofers and supports a frequency range of 60Hz to 20 KHz. It also includes Bluetooth 5.4 for device pairing and call functionality. Users can pair two speakers for stereo sound or connect up to 100 units for a larger audio setup, Xiaomi Nepal informed in a statement on Saturday.

With an IP67 rating, the speaker is water-resistant and dustproof, making it suitable for outdoor environments. It has a battery life of up to 12 hours and takes 2.5 hours to fully recharge.

The product has an award-winning design, recognised by the Red Dot Design Award, read the statement. It is compact, measuring 197 x 68 x 66 mm, and weighs 597g. The speaker comes in Black with an orange handle, Red, and Blue colour options.

Tanahun farmers earning millions from orange farms

BY AMAR RAJ NAHARKI
Tanahun, Dec. 21

Many farmers in Tanahun have achieved significant financial success through commercial orange cultivation, with some becoming millionaires.

Shuk Narayan Shrestha, an orange farmer from Umachowk in Myagde Rural Municipality-2, earned Rs. 7 million from selling oranges this year. He has become a model orange farmer in Tanahun, known for selling the highest quantity of oranges. What was once a hobby, planting orange trees for personal consumption and gifting to relatives and friends, has now turned into money-making business.

Similarly, Bishwo Bahadur Adhikari, who previously served as the chairman of the former District Development Committee twice, has transitioned from politics to commercial orange farming with his brother Nirmal Adhikari. Together, they earn an annual income of approximately Rs. 6.5 million from their orange farming. After gradually becoming inactive in politics, Bishwa now finds satisfaction in orange farming, which brings him both fame and fortune.

Bhim Bahadur Rana, chairman of the Devghat Area Development Committee and an orange farmer, earned Rs. 3

Women in Makwanpur transforming
lives through local entrepreneurship

BY ANIL PARAJULI
Hetauda, Dec. 21

Women in Makwanpur are becoming entrepreneurs by using local resources. Women of Hetauda, Manahari, and Makwanpurgadhi are starting sustainable ventures with locally available materials.

Women are getting engaged in income-generating activities and entrepreneurship by utilising natural resources like Artemisia, Aloe Vera, turmeric farming on community forest land, woodcraft, and selling locally produced vegetable dishes.

Women, who were previously confined to household chores, are now using local resources to enhance their income and entrepreneurial skills. In Manahari-4, Musedhap, women from the endangered Bankariya and Chepang communities have started producing organic soap using local herbs.

Living a nomadic life in the forest three decades ago, women of the Bankariya community are now producing soaps for washing dishes, clothes, and bathing using Aloe Vera, Artemisia, and Neem leaves.

Santoshi Bankariya, a leader of the Bankariya community, shared that 14 Bankariya and Chepang women established the Bankariya and Chepang Women Soap Factory with an initial investment of Rs. 20,000, funded through monthly savings of Rs. 50 per member.

The women produce small, medium, and large soaps priced between Rs. 20 to Rs. 60, selling them in Hetauda and Kathmandu.

Similarly, women from Makwanpurgadhi-5 have been earning income by cultivating turmeric on one hectare of land. Since 2020, the Bundal Women Agriculture Income Group has been cultivating turmeric on unused community forest land.

"We are a group of 40 women, working together in turns, cultivating turmeric on unused forest land," said Binita Lamichhane, president of the Bundal Women Agriculture Income Group.



PHOTO: ANIL PARAJULI/TRN

Soap produced by Bankariya and Chepang women in Musedhap, Manahari-4.

She mentioned that the turmeric is harvested, cleaned, separated, and processed before being sold. The locally produced turmeric and turmeric powder are consumed in the local market, yielding an annual production of 5,000 kilograms.

The women earn an annual income of Rs. 200,000 to Rs. 250,000 through turmeric farming. In Hetauda Sub-Metropolitan City-12, Ghalegaon, women have started producing organic Gundruk (fermented leafy green vegetable).

By registering as the Kanchenjunga Agriculture Cooperative Small Enterprise, women produce Gundruk and Gundruk pickles. With an initial investment of Rs. 100,000 obtained as a loan from the cooperative, 11 women leased 15 katthas of land to cultivate vegetables and launched their business.

Kanchenjunga Agriculture Cooperative chairperson Chinimaya Gurung informed that with support and training from Hetauda Sub-Metropolitan City and Green Foundation Nepal, the women have been producing Gundruk

in their spare time.

As the demand for Gundruk has increased, the cooperative now leases 30 katthas of land for vegetable farming. Since its inception in October 2024, the cooperative has been producing over 600 kilograms of Gundruk annually, earning over Rs. 300,000 from Gundruk and maize sales.

The Gundruk produced here, approved for production, distribution, storage, and processing by the Hetauda Food Technology and Quality Control Office, is sold in Hetauda, Kathmandu, Japan, and Australia.

In Hetauda-5, 50 women received nine months of woodcraft training in 2072 B.S. Since 2074 B.S., they have been running the Shramjibi Women Woodcraft Industry, producing handicrafts from locally available wood.

In collaboration with Asmita Nepal, 15 women are currently engaged in making wooden churns, photo frames, bell frames, and souvenirs.

"We have progressed steadily with our acquired skills. Women, who were

once confined to household work, are now earning up to Rs. 15,000 per month," said Bishnu Kumari Rai, chairperson of Shramjibi Women Woodcraft Industry.

She emphasised that women are capable of performing jobs traditionally done by men, and the sale of woodcrafts has been a successful income source.

Rai suggested that ministries, organisations, and cooperatives use locally produced crafts as souvenirs at annual meetings to ensure market access. She urged local governments to prioritise local products by formulating supportive policies.

Meanwhile, Green Foundation Nepal's central representative Aarati Pathak stressed the need to link women with income-generating activities while ensuring community forest conservation.

She emphasised that economic empowerment is vital for establishing women's rights, pledging the organisation's support for producing quality goods and marketing them nationally and internationally.

Electricity worth Rs. 13bn exported to India in 5 months

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 21

Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has exported electricity worth Rs. 13.04 billion during the first five months of the current fiscal year.

According to the NEA, about 1.76 billion units of electricity worth Rs. 13.04 billion have been exported to India from July 16 to December 15, 2024, of the current fiscal year 2024/25.

The NEA has exported surplus electricity to India during the rainy season for the last few years.

The average rate of electricity exported to India in the five months is Rs. 7.39 per unit.

The Authority is selling the surplus electricity at competitive rates in the day-ahead and real-time markets of the Indian Energy Exchange (IEX) and to the states of Haryana and Bihar as per the bilateral medium-term power sales agreement.

The electricity trade with India is done in Indian rupees. Therefore, the

Authority has earned an income of INR 8.15 billion by selling electricity during the review period.

The highest electricity export was Rs. 4.15 billion in the month of Shrawan (from July 16 to August 16), while the lowest was Rs. 281.4 million in the month of Mangsir (from November 16 to December 15).

The NEA exported electricity worth Rs. 3.68 billion in the month of Bhadra (from August 17 to December 16), Rs. 3.07 billion in the month of Ashoj (from September 17 to October 16) and Rs. 1.87 billion in the month of Karkti (October 17 to November 15).

Managing Director of NEA Kul Man Ghising said that exports of electricity were affected mainly due to the damage of the 456 MW Upper Tamakoshi Hydropower Project caused by floods and landslides in the last week of September. The power generation from the hydropower was stopped from September 28.

He said that electricity exports decreased in the following months due to the shutdown of Upper Tamakoshi and the reduction in power production from other hydropower projects with



the onset of the dry season, so this year power had to be imported earlier than last year to manage domestic demand.

Currently, electricity export has stopped and import has started, he said.

With the onset of winter, electricity generation of hydropower projects has decreased due to the reduction in water flow in rivers and streams, and electricity will have to be imported during the winter months to meet the domestic electricity demand.

"As the water flow in the rivers starts increasing, electricity exports will resume. From this year, 40 MW of electricity has also been exported to Bangladesh via India," he said.

"A target to export electricity of round Rs. 30 billion has been set for the current fiscal year. It is seen that the export target will be affected due to the damage to the hydropower projects and transmission lines by floods and landslides," said the NEA. The floods and

Bandipur sets
up employment
bank

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT
Tanahun, Dec. 21

Bandipur Rural Municipality of Tanahun district has established a employment bank.

The rural municipality has established the employment bank to make labour safe, organised and dignified. According to the rural municipality, the employment bank has been established to promote domestic employment. This labour bank will provide work to those looking for work and workers to employers.

Chairman of Bandipur Rural Municipality Surendra Bahadur Thapa said that the executive meeting of the rural municipality held on Friday decided to conduct employment exchange work by preparing the details of all types of skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled individuals and employers in a unified manner.

Thapa said, "We have decided to launch a labour market and demand-based employment skill development programme to make the youth entrepreneurial, self-employed and self-reliant."

According to him, individuals looking for work, employers looking for workers, and individuals interested in skill development can scan the QR code and go to the Google Form link, and fill out the application form through the ward office or the labour and employment branch.

The rural municipality said that the campaign has been launched with a long-term plan to reduce the number of youth going abroad in search of employment, enhance skills and creative abilities, arrange labour at the local level and accordingly manage wages and make the rural municipality economically strong.

"The rural municipality also has many of its products. The plan to use local labour in the marketing of those products is mentioned in the work procedure," said Chairman Thapa.

landslides damaged the Upper Tamakoshi and other small hydropower projects and the Kabeli Corridor transmission line.

The flood in Maikholi damaged the Kabeli Corridor, causing the production of about 200 MW of electricity from various projects connected to that line.

Due to this, electricity exports were affected in October and November.

The reconstruction of Upper Tamakoshi is moving on and will be operational by December 25, while the reconstruction of the Kabeli Corridor transmission line has been completed and has been put into operation.

As the water flow in the rivers and canals decreases with the onset of winter, the electricity production of the hydropower projects will decrease. Since the production will only meet domestic demand, electricity exports will gradually decrease.

The NEA has so far received approval from India to sell 941 MW of electricity generated from 28 projects in the Indian market under the competitive market and medium-term power sales agreements.

ICT Awards 2024 distributed

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 21

Prof. Dr. Suresh Raj Sharma has received Pioneer ICT Award 2024 for his lifelong contributions to ICT education and development. Minister for Communication and Information Technology, Prithvi Subba Gurung felicitated Prof. Sharma with the award at a programme organised in Kathmandu on Friday evening.

Nami Baral won the Nepali Diaspora ICT Award in individual category while Manohar Adhikari received Entrepreneur ICT Award, and Bandana Sharma was felicitated with Ncell Woman Icon ICT Award.

The ninth edition of the ICT Award 2024 followed over a dozen pre-events and a rigorous six-month selection process, awards were presented in 15 different categories, informed the organiser of the event, Living With ICT.

From the institutional category, Supreme Court of Nepal won Digital Governance ICT Award, IME Pay got Digital Services Award, and Sukuna Secondary School of Morang won Digital Education from public sector and LRI School of Kathmandu from the private sector.

Sukuna Secondary School received a robotics kit worth Rs. 50,000 from Dursiksha.

Likewise, various start-ups were also awarded on the occasion. CrimsonTech won Startup award, API Management System received Product award, SpeakUp Nepal got Rising Star Innovation award, and GeoKrishi The Asia Foundation Social Innovation award.

SpeakUp Nepal received US\$500 in Amazon Web Services credits by Genese Solution.

The Public Choice ICT Award 2024 went to Jyapa Services, while the South Asia Startup ICT Award 2024 was claimed by India's Hyphen SCS.

Addressing the event, Minister Gurung said that the government has fallen short of expectations in the information technology sector. "We declare an IT Decade but fail to allocate the necessary budget. Nepal still lacks a single IT park," he said.

However, he assured the government's commitment to improving infrastructure, reforming policies, and creating a business-friendly environment for the private sector.

Amber Bahadur Thapa, Chair of the Education, Health, and Technology Committee of the Federal Parliament, said that Nepal's IT development lags behind global trends.

Modern materials replace wooden roofs in Kalikot



THE VILLAGE OF PHOI MAHADEV IN WARD NO. 3 OF TILAGUFA MUNICIPALITY, NESTLED IN THE LAP OF THE HIMALAYAS.

BY PREM RAJ SIMKHADA
Kalikot, Dec. 21

The traditional appeal of Karnali's settlements, usually constructed with locally available materials, is slowly disappearing as modern construction materials and techniques become more common.

Once identical to heritage and sustainability, these indigenous designs are now being replaced by corrugated zinc sheets, marking a significant shift in the region's architectural landscape. Previously, most of the houses in Tilagufa Municipality of the district had wooden roofs. Now, they are being replaced by zinc sheets. In Ward No. 3 of Tilagufa, traditional houses used locally

cut stone, white kaolin clay, or lime mortar for walls, while porches were decorated with large, flat stone slabs. Doorways were coated with red clay as part of a tradition that is now fading. As these customs disappear, the villages are beginning to lose their distinct charm. Elderly residents of Phoi Mahadev shared their memories of the past.

Wooden roofs were built to cope with heavy snowfall, allowing snow to melt quickly. According to local resident Ain Bahadur Shahi, the large, flat stone slabs used in construction helped to retain warmth, but wooden roofs were essential to endure prolonged snowfall. When fires were lit inside homes, the smoke would help melt snow accumulated on the roofs.

In the past, bringing corrugated sheets from distant towns like Rajapur, Nepalgunj or Rupaidia was impractical. However, the shift to metal roofs has altered the aesthetic of the village. "From a distance, all you see are blue roofs," said Shahi said, highlighting the negative impact of development on the area's beauty.

Shahi also said that while corrugated sheets are cost-effective, they lack warmth and durability. He urged local governments to pay special attention to preserving the traditional identity of these villages and to protect the historical value of old structures for future generations and tourism.

Local youth Jeevan Shahi said that while traditional wooden and stone houses are visually attractive, deforestation and a lack of skilled labour have led to the decline of these practices. "We are focused on building new homes without much thought about preserving the future or the strength of older structures," he said.

Basmati Shahi, a health worker in Phol, observed stark differences between living in wooden-roofed homes, those with corrugated sheets and cement-based houses. "Wooden homes remain warm during snowfall, while other types feel cold even in spring. Cement houses, in particular, pose health risks in the Himalayan climate," she explained.

Elders in the village express their dissatisfaction, saying the replacement of traditional wooden roofs makes the settlements look lifeless.

Suspension bridge to be constructed in Gurvakot Municipality

BY LAJIT BASEL
Surkhet, Dec. 21

A 650-metre-long triple-span suspension bridge is set to be constructed in Gurvakot Municipality of Eastern Surkhet. The bridge will connect three wards of the municipality.

Former Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister and Nepali Congress Vice President Purna Bahadur Khadka laid the foundation stone of the bridge on Tuesday.

The bridge will be built with its main pillar established in the Khatang area, connecting Wards 8, 12 and 13 of the municipality. While laying the foundation stone, Vice President Khadka said that the Khatang area was a significant religious and tourist site and the triple-span bridge would aid in promoting internal tourism. Stating that the budget for the bridge construction was sufficient, he suggested the construction company to ensure timely completion of the project.

According to Gopal Thapa, an engineer from the Suspension Bridge Division in Pulchowk, the Khatang Bridge will be Nepal's longest triple-span suspension bridge. He stated that construction was

underway and is expected to be completed by June/July 2026. The bridge will span 654 metres in length and have a width of 1.6 metres. He claimed that this would be the longest among the triple-span bridges constructed or under construction in Nepal.

The project of Rs. 211.9 million was awarded to Shree Gita Construction on June 25. The construction company has already completed the foundation for the main tower at the Khatang site and is intensifying work on the foundations on the Mehalkuna and Dahachaur sides. The height of the tower will be 25.23 metres.

According to the Suspension Bridge Division, the main tower in the Khatang area will be supported by 25 pillars, each 22 metres deep. Similarly, 14 pillars, each 16 metres deep, will be constructed in Ghumkhare. On the Dahachaur and Mehalkuna sides, RCC (Reinforced Cement Concrete) foundations will be built.

Engineer Thapa said that the Ghumkhare area is lower than the other two regions, which necessitates the construction of 14 deep pillars. He added that the other two areas were at the same height as the main tower. The bridge will feature equal spans on all three sides, with each span measuring 218.2 metres from the main tower.

Nagarjun-1 conducts free cataract surgeries for 45 residents



LOCALS RECEIVING FREE CATARACT SURGERIES IN NAGARJUN.

BY A STAFF REPORTER
Kathmandu, Dec. 21

Nagarjun Municipality-1, Kathmandu successfully conducted free cataract surgeries for 45 elderly people on Saturday.

Ward Chairman Rameshwar Lama said that the surgeries were funded entirely through the ward's administrative initiatives and budget.

According to him, the surgeries were performed with technical support and expertise provided by Matrika Eye Centre in Baneshwar.

The beneficiaries were identified

during an eye and cataract screening health camp organised by the ward on December 7 and their surgeries were conducted on Saturday.

Although during the eye health camp, 116 people were diagnosed with cataract problems, only 45 contacted the ward office for surgeries, said Lama.

Lama said that undergoing cataract surgery in private hospitals costs at least Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 30,000 per person.

Hence, the ward undertook this initiative to ensure access to affordable eye care for the ward residents. The ward also arranged free transportation for the patients, he said.

Medical College's staff on protest

BY SIRAJ KHAN
Nepalgunj, Dec. 21

Employees of Nepalgunj Medical College have completely shut down the Outpatient Department (OPD) services at Kohalpur and Nepalgunj teaching hospitals demanding a salary increment.

The closure of OPD services at Kohalpur Teaching Hospital, the largest private hospital in western Nepal, and the teaching hospital in Nepalgunj has caused significant inconvenience for patients.

Demanding a salary hike as agreed by the government, employees of the medical college and teaching hospitals, are currently in the second phase of their protest. They had partially shut down OPD services on Wednesday and Thursday.

However, after their demands were ignored, they fully closed OPD services at both hospitals and halted academic activities at the medical college starting from Friday, according to Ratna Giri, the coordinator of the Central Protest Mobilisation Committee.

Giri further said that the hospital management has resorted to issuing threats and intimidation instead of addressing the employees' legitimate demands. So, the OPD services have been shut down indefinitely.

Emergency services, however, are still operational, considering the patients' difficulties, Giri said, warning of further escalation if the demands are not met. The complete shutdown of OPD services at both hospitals left many patients without treatment on Friday, forcing them to



PROTESTING EMPLOYEES PADLOCK THE OPD AT THE TEACHING HOSPITAL.

return home without receiving medical care.

The general public has also raised concerns and criticised the medical college and its affiliated hospitals for significantly increasing service charges while neglecting to raise employees' salaries.

Javed Rai of Nepalgunj-11 said that it was unfair for hospitals to heavily burden patients with exorbitant service charges while denying employees their rightful salary increments. He also urged local authorities to interfere and reduce the excessively increased service fees.

The employees of Nepalgunj Medical College, operated by Lord Buddha Educational Academy, are currently in the second phase of their protest after their demands remained unaddressed during the first phase.

Despite several rounds of negotiations between the protesting employees and hospital management, no resolution has been reached, compelling the employees to continue their strike.

The employees submitted a seven-point demand letter to the hospital administration on June 18, 2024, seeking salary increments, improved services and facilities and institutional reforms. However, the hospital management has shown no willingness to address their concerns, leading to the escalation of protests.

Safeguard efforts made for farmers and sanitation workers in Banke

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT
Nepalgunj, Dec. 21

Efforts have been made to safeguard the occupational health and safety of 2,000 farmers and sanitation workers across three municipalities in Banke district, protecting them from potential occupational hazards.

The Health Office Banke reported that 1,500 farmers and 500 sanitation workers from Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City, Dudhuwa and Khajura Rural Municipalities are being provided with occupational health and safety services.

Chief of the Health Office Banke, Angad Bahadur Shahi, stated that these activities are being carried out under the "Occupational and Environmental Health Support Project," aimed at reducing occupational risks and ensuring health safety for farmers and sanitation workers in these three municipalities.

He further explained that the project, implemented by Bheri Environmental Excellence

Group (B-Group) with the support of AFD and MDM France, has significantly facilitated the work of sanitation workers and farmers at risk.

The Health Office noted that the project provides awareness training, distributes personal protective equipment and conducts regular health check-ups and counselling for the farmers and sanitation workers.

Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City Deputy Mayor Kamaruddin Rai mentioned that the project has reduced risks and improved health security for sanitation workers, who previously faced high health risks due to various types of waste. Now, they feel safer and healthier.

Chairperson of Khajura Rural Municipality, Dambar BK, highlighted that the project has been highly effective in ensuring the health and safety of farmers exposed to pesticides and sanitation workers handling hazardous waste.

Farmers and sanitation workers from the three municipalities involved in the project regularly receive health check-ups and counselling services from five local health institutions.

Government of Nepal
Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport
Department of Roads
Mechanical Training Center, Patandhoka
Invitation for Bids
Date of publication: 2024/12/22
The Mechanical Training Centre, Patandhoka, Lalitpur invites electronic bids from eligible bidders for the following construction work National Competitive Bidding – Single Stage Single Envelope Bidding procedures.

Descriptions	IFB No.	Estimated Amount (with VAT and PS) NRs.	Minimum bid security amount, NRs.
Construction Of Equipment Parking Garage in Heavy Equipment Division, Janakpur	MTC/337310113/ NCB/081-82/07	96,59,713.42	250,000.00

For more details, please visit PPMO website: www.bolpatra.gov.np/cgp

GOVERNMENT OF NEPAL (GoN)
MASTER GENERAL OF ORDNANCE (PROVISION)
NEPALI ARMY HEADQUARTERS, BHADRAKALI, KATHMANDU, NEPAL
Invitation e-Bids for Special Equipment & Accessories
First Date of Publication: 22 December, 2024
1. The *Master General of Ordnance (MGO) (Provision)*, *Nepali Army Headquarters* invites electronic bids from eligible bidders for the procurement of the following items required for the Nepali Army under International Competitive Bidding (ICB) procedures specified in Public Procurement Act and Regulations:

S. No.	Contract Identification No:	Description of Item	Quantity	Price of Bid Document NRs	Bid Bond Amount NRs	Bid Validity	Pre-bid Meeting	Last date of Bid submission	Bid Opening	Remarks
1.	MGO/ Special Equipment & Accessories /081/82/09	Special Equipment & Accessories	Various	3,000.00	NPR 1,51,000.00	120 Days	1100 hours NST of 12 January, 2025	1200 Hours NST of 05 February, 2025	1300 Hours NST of 05 February,, 2025	CIP- Kathmandu, Nepal.

2. Eligible Bidders may visit PPMO's e-GP system www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp or obtain further information and inspect the bidding documents at the Office of MGO (Provision), Nepali Army Headquarters, Bhadrakali, Kathmandu, Nepal (Tel. +977-1-5979124) during office hours. Bids must be accompanied by bid security, amounting to above mentioned **bid bond amount** (Equivalent amount in bid currency at selling exchange rate published by Nepal Rastra Bank on bid notice publication date).
3. Fee of bidding document of **Special Equipment & Accessories** must be deposited in **Account Name:** Master General of Ordnance (Provision.), **Name of the Bank:** Nepal Bank Ltd., Bhugol Park Kathmandu, **Office Code No:** 345013563, **Revenue Account No:** 0010100000001001001 & **Revenue Title (Rajaswa Shirshak) No:** 14229.

EDITORIAL

Boost Revenue Collection

The government's income during the first five months of this fiscal year 2024/25 has seen a modest increase. At the end of the review period (July 16 – December 14, 2024), the total income stood at Rs. 404.30 billion (Rs. 398.13 billion in revenue plus Rs. 6.17 billion under other recipients), which accounts for 27.47 per cent of the annual receipts target. Out of the total revenue, tax revenue stood at Rs. 361.13 billion or 27.39 per cent of the annual target. Of the total revenue collection target, Rs. 1,284.2 billion is set to be collected under tax revenue and Rs. 135.09 billion under non-tax revenue in the current fiscal year.

By comparison, the government collected only 25.45 per cent (Rs.362.04 billion) revenue of the annual target of Rs. 1,422.5 billion in the first five months of the last fiscal year. However, the capital budget expenditure has continued to remain woefully low, standing at only 11.58 per cent by mid-December of this year, down from 12 per cent during the same period last fiscal. Of the Rs. 352.35 billion allocated under capital expenditure, only Rs. 40.8 billion was spent in the first five months of the current fiscal.

The sluggish pace of work in the national pride projects and other projects has been blamed for the poor capital expenditure. During the review period, the government spent Rs. 404.3 billion, 27.47 per cent of the total budget allocation. The recurrent expenditure of the government stood at 31.87 per cent (Rs. 363.54 billion) during that period out of allocated Rs. 1,140.66 billion.

Amid this encouraging news, there's no denying the fact that challenges persist. The worrying gap between the revenue collection and the recurrent expenditure is forcing the successive governments to borrow heavily to cover the shortfall, increasing the nation's loan to GDP ratio. The nonstop growing debt burden not only threatens the country's solvency but also tarnishes our credit rating. This may thwart our future effort to borrow money when we need it the most.

With revenue collection falling short of the target year after year, the government seems to be in no position to repay its loan anytime soon. Should this situation persist, it will be left with no option but to take out more loan even to carry out the debt servicing. As such, instead of opting for more loan, the government should go for widening its tax net. One of the most effective ways to do this is to formalise the informal sector, which constitutes the bulk of the economy. The IMF's recent assessment that the country's credit rating is far from distress level mustn't lull the government into binge borrowing.

The long-standing issue of poor capital expenditure is another cause for concern. The problem has now percolated into provinces, with all provinces reeling from inability to spend a significant chunk of their earmarked budget. The implications of this are far-reaching: projects crucial to create mass employments fail to take off, leaving many youths unemployed and frustrating their dream of building a decent future out of poverty; critical infrastructures vital to create environment conducive to businesses, which can well be important source of the government's revenue, fail to materialise; and development work suffers, dealing a heavy blow to our aspiration to graduate to the developing country status from an underdeveloped one, among many other repercussions.

Keep Your Promise

PARMESHWAR DEVKOTA

The Rising Nepal, the co-publication of Gorkhapatra daily, celebrated its 59th anniversary in Kathmandu. Gorkhapatra Sansthan, the country's oldest media organisation, has been bringing out two daily newspapers - Gorkhapatra in Nepali, The Rising Nepal in English and three monthly magazines - Madhupark, Yuba Mancha and Muna. Madhupark is a literary publication, whereas Yuba Mancha and Muna focus on the issues of youths and children respectively. In addition, the corporation also runs online editions of two dailies. Gorkhapatra Sansthan, a state-owned undertaking, has been serving the country for 124 years uninterrupted.

Its head office is located at New Road, a prime location in Kathmandu, but the sad part is that its administration operates from an old building constructed during Rana period. It has suffered cracks due to earthquake in 2015. The in-house laws and regulations are not compatible with the present system. Inability to introduce new Act has hindered the Corporation from recruiting new employees and journalists, and promoting the working staff. Comparing with other undertakings under the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, Gorkhapatra Corporation lacks modern building.

Nepal Television has a huge modern building, the Rastriya Samachar Samati has two big office buildings and Press Council has also got new building with the modern facilities and spacious rooms. Additionally, the staff and journalists of those organisations have been enjoying internal promotions but the employees of the Gorkhapatra Corporation have been deprived of this facility.

As it is running under the Ministry's jurisdiction, the government appoints the executive chairman, general manager and editorial and legal advisors.

Now it is high time the government should bring new Act to address the existing problems of Gorkhapatra Corporation.

As the new chiefs and advisors assume office, they deliver promising speeches, boosting the confidence of the employees. But only a few of the executives have been able to live up to the expectations.

Secretary at the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology Radha Aryal and Minister Prithvi Subba Gurung addressed the function organised to mark the 59th anniversary of TRN. It is believed that Secretary Aryal has long and proven experience in the communication sector and Minister Gurung is considered as proactive leader, who can take bold decisions.

Secretary Radhika Aryal delivered her speech so meticulously that she covered almost all issues besetting the communication sector. Her speech was comprehensive and informative. As Minister Gurung took the podium and began to speak, we paid heed to his every words carefully. Gurung talked about broad areas of national affairs and economy. He pointed out the need for carrying out legal and institutional restructuring of the state agencies. His remark that the publications of the Gorkhapatra Sansthan are the properties of all the 761 governments of the state has gone well with the audience.

Now it is high time the government should bring new Act to address the existing problems of Gorkhapatra Corporation. Given the fact that the traditional media outlets are facing challenges from the digital media, the timely steps on the part of the corporation and related department are a must to enable the competitive edge of its publications.

BRI Coopewration Framework Bolsters Nepal-China Economic Ties

Ritu Raj Subedi



It seems the debate on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has slowed down at the moment. Prior to Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's visit to China early this month, the political spectrum was divided on the funding modality of BRI projects. After Nepal and China signed a Framework for Belt and Road Cooperation in the first week of this month, there was some ruckus within the ruling Nepali Congress over the use of certain terminology in the accord. On the other hand, communist parties have hailed the deal and stressed its implementation to benefit the two countries. Though the two countries have not entered a deal on implementing any of the 10 selected projects, the agreement on the cooperation framework sheds light on theoretical and practical insights into the projects and their implementation.

Whether or not the agreement carries elements of controversy, it is essential to make nuanced understanding of it. The word 'cooperation' has repeatedly featured in the text that also indicates the BRI projects are not one-sided venture. It states that even the third party can be a part of it to plug the fund gap. It has highlighted the importance of selected projects in giving fresh momentum to connectivity, infrastructure, trade, investment and tourism between the two countries. For instance, Tokha-Chahare-Bidur Highway that includes tunnel is seen as strategic project in boosting Nepal-China international trade.

Regional Integration

Nepali section of the China-Nepal cross-border railway project directly links Nepal with China. Not only this, it also holds

huge potential of regional integration as the railway serves as China's gateway to South Asia, enabling it to access to the Indian market. Likewise, Hilsa-Simikot and Kimathanka-Khandbari road will open north-south corridors, promoting China-Nepal-India trilateral cooperation. Jilong-Rasuwadaghi-Chilime 220 KV cross-border power transmission line will be a milestone in energy cooperation between the two nations. Nepal can sell surplus electricity to the northern neighbour.

Expressed in 10 points under six headings, the accord is seen as the culmination of positive developments in Nepal-China relations. Divided into six parts – cooperation background, cooperation principles, cooperation objectives, cooperation priorities, identified projects for negotiations and cooperation mechanisms -, it has provided a structured basis to undertake negotiations for the implementation of the prospective projects. The cooperation principles incorporate joint consultation for common development, pragmatic cooperation for meaningful effects and enabling policy environment for the increased investment.

The BRI projects will be built under the 'aid financing modality' and technical support from China, according to the cooperation framework. The term 'aid financing' comprises grants, loan/soft loans or investment. For this, they will also explore the sources of funding that suit requirements for sovereign initiated projects. They can also request international multilateral development institutions interested in investing in connectivity and development projects. Their participation can increase credibility and acceptance of BRI projects at regional and international level.

The framework document has stressed peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning, joint consultation and contribution for shared benefits. Moreover, it promotes green, clean and environment-friendly economic development to

Nepal and China have expressed commitment to respecting the principle of equal sovereignty in terms of policy formation, project selection and execution, fund mobilisation and mustering cooperation from other nations.

realise people's welfare and sustainability. Respecting each other's sovereignty and common interest and working together to improve people livelihoods through mutually beneficial and win-win cooperation lies at the heart of the cooperation pact. Nepal and China have expressed commitment to respecting the principle of equal sovereignty in terms of policy formation, project selection and execution, fund mobilisation and mustering cooperation from other nations. This policy autonomy widens the scope of consultations and negotiations for conducting feasibility study and mobilising financial and human resources for the projects.

The framework has accorded due consideration to the developmental stages of China and Nepal, with particular emphasis on the latter's specific development requirements and priorities. Given that Nepal is still a least-developed country, with weak industrial base, it stands to benefit from the Chinese investment, technology, experiences and expertise in the development of big infrastructure. The framework has rightly emphasised on tapping cooperation potential and encouraging innovation with objective analysis of technical, financial, commercial and

economic feasibility of the projects that are in the long-term interest of the two countries, ensure value of money and give more tangible benefits of high standard BRI cooperation.

Use of national currencies

The concerned agencies of two nations will independently assume sole responsibility for their own profits, losses and risks. The two sides require to abide by market-related rules and regulations, and applicable international standards and the national laws and regulations of each country. The framework has paved the way for the use of national currencies in bilateral trade transactions and investment based on the practical situation. This will indeed boost the value of local currencies and lessen dependency on the US dollar. For this, Nepal will facilitate to establish branches of Chinese banks and financial institutions within its territory. In a similar manner, the Nepali institutional investors will be allowed to invest in Chinese financial market.

The two nations had signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the implementation of BRI in Kathmandu in 2017. Likewise, in 2018, they agreed to jointly build the Trans-Himalayan Multidimensional Connectivity Network (THMDCN) in Beijing through the construction of ports, roads including bridges and tunnels, railways, aviation infrastructure, telecommunication projects, electricity transmission lines to upgrade the level of connectivity. Similarly, Nepal-China relation was elevated to strategic partnership in 2019 during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Nepal. Now it is imperative to build high level political trust between the two nations to strike deals on specific BRI projects. Then only can the Cooperation Framework prove to be a milestone in ushering Nepal-China economic cooperation in a new phase.

(The author is Deputy Executive Editor of The Rising Nepal.)

Understanding Anxiety Disorders

Dr. Shyam P Lohani



Excessive worry

There are different spectrum of conditions that falls under anxiety disorders that include generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, and specific phobias. These disorders are characterized by excessive worry, fear, or apprehension that is disproportionate to the actual situation. Physical symptoms such as palpitations, shortness of breath, sweating, and gastrointestinal issues often accompany these mental strains.

While anxiety disorders occur globally, their prevalence varies across regions. Developed countries often report higher rates due to better diagnostic tools and awareness, whereas underreported cases in low- and middle-income countries suggest significant unmet needs. Anxiety is a natural response to stress; it becomes a disorder when it interferes with daily functioning. For instance, someone with social anxiety disorder might avoid necessary interactions at work or school, fearing judgment or rejection.

The causes of anxiety disorders are multifaceted, involving a blend of genetic, environmental, and psychological factors. Research shows that imbalances in neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine can contribute to anxiety disorders. Early childhood trauma, abuse, or high-stress environments can predispose individuals to anxiety. In today's digital age, constant exposure to social media and unrealistic societal expectations often fuels anxiety, especially among younger populations. The impact of anxiety disorders extends beyond individuals. Workplaces face reduced productivity, families endure strained relationships, and healthcare systems bear increased costs. Yet, the stigma around mental health often prevents people from seeking help.

It is essential to foster a culture of understanding and support, we can help those struggling with anxiety lead fulfilling lives.

Screening for anxiety symptoms, especially in high-risk groups like adolescents and trauma survivors, can help detect early signs. School-based mental health programmes and workplace wellness initiatives play a pivotal role. Teaching coping mechanisms and stress management techniques in schools and workplaces can empower individuals. Practices like yoga, meditation, and deep-breathing exercises have proven effective in reducing anxiety levels. Reduction of socioeconomic disparities, promoting work-life balance, and fostering supportive communities can mitigate external triggers of anxiety. Hence, increasing awareness about anxiety disorders, their symptoms, and the importance of seeking help can help reduce stigma and encourage people to seek treatment.

Governments and healthcare systems must prioritise mental health funding, integrate mental health services into primary care, and train healthcare professionals in early diagnosis and treatment. Public awareness campaigns, educational initiatives, and open conversations about mental health can play a pivotal role in reducing stigma. Therefore, recognising anxiety disorders as legitimate medical conditions rather than personal weaknesses is a crucial step.

Fortunately, anxiety disorders are treatable. Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) is highly effective in addressing negative

thought patterns and developing coping strategies. Anti-anxiety medications or antidepressants can help manage symptoms when combined with therapy. Regular exercise, mindfulness, and a balanced diet can reduce stress and improve overall well-being. Epidemiological data provide invaluable insights into the prevalence, risk factors, and trends of anxiety disorders. The data helps policymakers allocate resources effectively and design targeted interventions. For instance, identifying high-prevalence regions or at-risk demographics allows for the implementation of tailored prevention programmes.

Collaborative efforts

Anxiety disorders are not just individual challenges but societal ones, with far-reaching consequences for productivity, healthcare costs, and overall well-being. Thus, with epidemiological insights and prevention strategies, we can address this growing public health issue. There is a need of collaborative efforts among governments, healthcare providers, communities, and individuals in order to create a world where anxiety disorders are less common and more manageable.

Anxiety disorders are a pressing concern in our fast-paced, high-pressure world. This issue requires collective efforts from individuals, communities, and policymakers to acknowledge its burden and ensure help to people who suffers its insult. Thus, it is essential to foster a culture of understanding and support, we can help those struggling with anxiety lead fulfilling lives. The key lies in acknowledging the problem, seeking help, and encouraging others to do the same.

(Dr. Lohani is the executive director at the Health Concern. lohanis@gmail.com.)

50 YEARS AGO

THE RISING NEPAL

December 22, 1974

Wheat Seed In Short Supply In Sarlahi

Sarlahi, Dec. 21: Farmers in Sariahi district have not been able to acquire improved variety of wheat from Agriculture Marketing Corporation to meet their needs, reports RSS.

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Or send them to
P.O. Box 23, Kathmandu, Nepal

READER'S MAIL

Awareness Campaign To Contain Mpox Risk

This is in reference to the news article entitled "Mpox Infection Reappears," published in this daily on December 21. Monkeypox (Mpox) is caused by the monkeypox virus. It can be transmitted through person-to-person contact, an infected animal's bite, scratch, or meat.

It can also be transmitted through contamination of towels, sharing a bed, saliva, blood during donations, using infected syringes, etc., and from a pregnant mother to her baby. According to the WHO, patients experience symptoms like skin rashes, fever, headache, muscle aches, sore throat, back pain, and swollen lymph nodes. There are no specific treatments or vaccines to cure Mpox, as it typically recovers on its own after a few weeks but can weaken the immune system.

According to the Ministry of Health



and Population, there are very few cases recorded in Nepal since 2023, but before the outbreak of the virus, we should be aware and take every precaution to protect ourselves from the disease. The awareness campaign should be conducted in cities and villages prior to the risk of Mpox. It will educate people beforehand about the causes, symptoms, and prevention of the virus.

Anushma Dhungel
Kathmandu

TAILPIECE

A Texan was taking a taxi tour of London and was in a hurry. As they went by the Tower of London the cab driver explained what it was and that construction of it started in 1346 and was completed in 1412. 'The Texan replied, "Shoot, a little of' tower like that? In Houston we'd have that thing up in two weeks!" Next they passed the House of Parliament - started in 1544 and completed in 1618. "Well boy, we put up a bigger one than that in Dallas and it only took a year!" As they passed Westminster Abbey the cab driver was silent. "Whoah! What's that over there?" asked the Texan. The driver replied, "I don't know, it wasn't there yesterday."

Germans mourn attack on Christmas market with no answers about why

AP
Magdeburg, Germany, Dec. 21

Germans on Saturday mourned a violent attack and their shaken sense of security after a Saudi doctor intentionally drove a black BMW into a Christmas market teeming with holiday shoppers, killing at least five people, including a small child, and injuring at least 200 others.

Authorities arrested a 50-year-old man at the site of the attack Friday evening and took him into custody for questioning. He has lived in Germany for nearly two decades, practicing medicine in Bernburg, about 40 kilometres (25 miles) south of Magdeburg. Officials said.

Several German media outlets identified the man as Taleb A., withholding his last name in line with privacy laws, and reported that he was a specialist in psychiatry and psychotherapy.

Mourners lit candles and placed flowers outside a church near the market on the cold and gloomy day. Several people stopped and cried. A Berlin church choir whose members witnessed the 2016 Christmas market attack sang Amazing Grace, a hymn about God's mercy, offering their prayers and solidarity with the victims. There were still no answers Saturday as to what caused him to drive into a crowd in the eastern German city of Magdeburg. Describing himself as a former Muslim, the suspect shared dozens of tweets and retweets daily focusing on anti-Islam themes, criticizing the religion and congratulating Muslims who left the faith.

He also accused German authorities of failing to do enough to combat what he said was the "Islamism of Europe." Some described him as an activist who helped Saudi women flee their homeland. He has also voiced support for the far-right and anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD) party.

Recently, he seemed focused on his theory that German authorities have been targeting Saudi asylum seekers.

Prominent German terrorism expert Peter Neumann said he had yet to come across a suspect in an act of mass violence with that profile.



PHOTO: AP
A police officer guards at a blocked road near a Christmas market after an incident in Magdeburg, Germany, Friday, Dec. 20, 2024.

"After 25 years in this 'business' you think nothing could surprise you anymore. But a 50-year-old Saudi ex-Muslim who lives in East Germany, loves the AfD and wants to punish Germany for its tolerance towards Islamists — that really wasn't on my radar," Neumann, the director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence at King's College London, wrote on X.

The two people confirmed dead were an adult and a toddler, but officials said additional deaths couldn't be ruled out because 15 people had been seriously injured. "As things stand, he is a lone perpetrator, so that as far as we know there is no further danger to the city," Saxony-Anhalt's governor, Reiner Haseloff, told reporters. "Every human life that has fallen victim to this attack is a terrible tragedy and one human life too many."

The violence shocked Germany and the city, bringing its mayor to the verge of tears and marring a festive event that's part of a centuries-old German

tradition. It prompted several other German towns to cancel their weekend Christmas markets as a precaution and out of solidarity with Magdeburg's loss. Berlin kept its markets open but has increased its police presence at them.

Germany has suffered a string of extremist attacks in recent years, including a knife attack that killed three people and wounded eight at a festival in the western city of Solingen in August.

Magdeburg is a city of about 240,000 people, west of Berlin, that serves as Saxony-Anhalt's capital. Friday's attack came eight years after an Islamic extremist drove a truck into a crowded Christmas market in Berlin, killing 13 people and injuring many others. The attacker was killed days later in a shootout in Italy.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Interior Minister Nancy Faeser traveled to Magdeburg on Saturday, and a memorial service is to take place in the city cathedral in the evening.

Verified bystander footage

distributed by the German news agency dpa showed the suspect's arrest at a tram stop in the middle of the road. A nearby police officer pointing a handgun at the man shouted at him as he lay prone, his head arched up slightly. Other officers swarmed around the suspect and took him into custody.

Thi Linh Chi Nguyen, a 34-year-old manicurist from Vietnam whose salon is located in a mall across from the Christmas market, was on the phone during a break when she heard loud bangs and thought at first they were fireworks. She then saw a car drive through the market at high speed. People screamed and a child was thrown into the air by the car.

Shaking as she described the horror of what she witnessed, she recalled seeing the car bursting out of the market and turning right onto Ernst-Reuter-Allee street and then coming to a standstill at the tram stop where the suspect was arrested. The number of injured people was overwhelming.

US drops bounty offered for Syrian rebel leader

AP
Damascus, Syria, Dec. 21

The Biden administration said Friday it has decided not to pursue a \$10 million reward it had offered for the capture of a Syrian rebel leader whose forces led the ouster of President Bashar Assad earlier this month.

The announcement followed a meeting in Damascus between the leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, Ahmad al-Sharaa, who was once aligned with al-Qaida, and the top U.S. diplomat for the Middle East, Barbara Leaf, who led the first U.S. diplomatic delegation into Syria since Assad's ouster.

HTS remains designated a foreign terrorist organization, and Leaf would not say if sanctions stemming from that designation would be eased. But, she told reporters that al-Sharaa had committed to renouncing terrorism and as a result the U.S. would no longer offer the reward. "We discussed the critical need to ensure terrorist groups cannot pose a threat inside Syria or externally, including to the U.S. and our partners in the region," she said.

"Based on our discussion, I told him that we would not be pursuing the Rewards for Justice reward offered," Leaf said in a telephone news conference from Jordan where she travelled after visiting Syria.

Leaf and other U.S. officials have said al-Sharaa's public statements about protecting minority and women's rights are welcomed, but they remain skeptical that he will follow through on them in the long run.

"He came across as pragmatic," she said. "It was a good first meeting. We will judge by deeds not just by words."

The U.S. delegation's visit was aimed at pushing for an inclusive government and seeking information on the whereabouts of missing American journalist Austin Tice.

Along with Leaf, former special envoy for Syria Daniel Rubinstein and the Biden administration's chief envoy for hostage negotiations, Roger Carstens, joined the meetings with interim leaders and members of civil society.

Carstens said there was no new information confirming Tice's fate or



FILE PHOTO: AP
New leader of Syria Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.

whereabouts but vowed that efforts to find him would continue. He travelled previously to Lebanon to seek information. More U.S. officials are expected to visit Syria in the coming days to pick up the search, he said.

"We're going to be like bulldogs on this," Carstens said, adding that the U.S. was focusing on about six prisons where it believed Tice may have been held in the past. He said the U.S. also had information about three more prisons where Tice might have been incarcerated, and up to 40 sites may end up being examined for evidence of Tice's presence.

Tice, who has had his work published by The Washington Post, McClatchy newspapers and others, disappeared at a checkpoint in a contested area west of Damascus as the Syrian civil war intensified.

A video released weeks after Tice went missing showed him blindfolded and held by armed men and saying, "Oh, Jesus." He has not been heard from since. Assad's government publicly denied that it was holding him.

Leaf's team was the first group of American diplomats to formally visit Syria in more than a decade, since the U.S. shuttered its embassy in Damascus in 2012, although a small number of U.S. diplomats had been assigned to political advisory roles with military units inside Syria since then.

Ukraine kills six Russians with US-supplied missiles

AP
Kyiv, Ukraine, Dec. 21

A Ukrainian attack Friday on a town in Russia's Kursk border region using U.S.-supplied missiles killed six people, including a child, a senior local official said. The attack came hours after Ukrainian authorities said a Russian ballistic missile strike on Kyiv killed at least one person and wounded 13.

Moscow claimed the Kyiv strike was in response to a Ukrainian strike on Russian soil using American-made weapons earlier this week.

Ten other people in the Kursk town of Rysk, including a 13-year-old, were hospitalized after Friday's strike with HIMARS missiles, Kursk acting Gov. Alexander Khinshtein said. He provided no further details.

Russia is trying to push back a Ukrainian incursion into Kursk that was launched in early August, but Ukraine's troops are dug in.

The truck-mounted HIMARS launchers fire GPS-guided missiles capable of hitting targets up to 80 kilometres (50 miles) away. The mobile launchers are hard for the enemy to spot and can quickly change position after firing to escape airstrikes.

President Joe Biden last month authorized Ukraine to use U.S.-supplied

missiles to strike deeper inside Russia, easing limitations on the longer range weapons. The move was a response to Russia deploying thousands of North Korean troops to reinforce its war effort, officials said.

Shortly before sunrise Friday, at least three loud blasts were heard in Kyiv. Ukraine's air force said it intercepted five Iskander short-range ballistic missiles fired at the city. The attack knocked out heating to 630 residential buildings, 16 medical facilities and 30 schools and kindergartens, the city administration said. Falling missile debris caused damage and sparked fires in three districts.

"We ask citizens to immediately respond to reports of ballistic attack threats, because there is very little time to find shelter," the air force said.

During the nearly three years since the war began, Russia has regularly bombed civilian areas of Ukraine, often in an attempt to cripple the power grid and unnerve Ukrainians. Ukraine, struggling to hold back Russia's bigger army on the front line, has attempted to strike Russian infrastructure supporting the country's war effort.

The falling debris in Kyiv caused damage to around two dozen high-rise office buildings in the city centre as well as the landmark Catholic Church of St. Nicholas and the Kyiv National Linguistic University.

US Senate approves 235th judge of Biden's term, beating Trump's tally

AP
Washington, Dec. 21

President Joe Biden secured the 235th judicial confirmation of his presidency Friday, an accomplishment that exceeds his predecessor's total by one after Democrats put extra emphasis on the federal courts following Donald Trump's far-reaching first term, when he filled three seats on the Supreme Court.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., teed up votes Friday on two California district judges, and they were the last judicial confirmations this year before Congress adjourns and makes way for a new, Republican-led Senate.

The confirmation of Serena Raquel Murlilo to be a district judge for the Central District of California broke Trump's mark. The tally also marks the largest number of confirmations in a single term since the Jimmy Carter administration. Come next year, Republicans will look to boost Trump's already considerable influence on the makeup of the federal judiciary in his second term.

Biden and Senate Democrats placed particular focus on adding women, minorities and public defenders to the judicial rank. About two-thirds of Biden's appointees are women and a



PHOTO: AP
Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, meet with reporters to mark the confirmation of 235 federal judges nominated by President Joe Biden during the 118th Congress, at the Capitol in Washington, Friday, Dec. 20, 2024.

solid majority of appointees are people of colour. The most notable appointee was Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, the first African American woman to serve on the nation's highest court.

"When I ran for President, I promised to build a bench that looks like America and reflects the promise of our nation. And I'm proud I kept my commitment

to bolstering confidence in judicial decision-making and outcomes," Biden said in a statement.

Sen. Dick Durbin, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said that prior to the Democrats' efforts, the number of women on the bench had been diminished, and it was made up overwhelmingly of white males.

Amazon and Starbucks workers are on strike; look at Trump

AP
Las Vegas Strip, Dec. 21

Amazon delivery drivers and Starbucks baristas are on strike in a handful of U.S. cities as they seek to exert pressure on the two major companies to recognize them as unionized employees or to meet demands for an inaugural labour contract.

The strikes that started Thursday and Friday followed other recent stand-offs between corporate America and organized labour. Large and established labour unions secured meaningful employer concessions this year following strikes by Boeing factory workers, dockworkers at East and Gulf coast ports, video game performers, and hotel and casino workers on the Las Vegas Strip.

But workers at Starbucks, Amazon and some other prominent consumer brands still are fighting for their first

contracts. Amazon refuses to acknowledge the organizing efforts of drivers and warehouse workers — many of whom have voted to unionize — even though the powerful Teamsters union says it represents them. Starbucks long resisted the unionization of its stores, but had agreed to negotiate a contract by the end of the year.

Strikes — particularly ones that happen during the holidays, a time of high economic activity — can help unions exercise leverage during negotiations or flex their muscles by garnering support from workers and sympathetic consumers.

Both Amazon and Starbucks saw a wave of organizing efforts following the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic focused attention on front-line workers and the impact of economic inequality on the lives of wage-earning Americans.

Employees organized at bookstores, where unions are rare, and were



PHOTO: AP
Starbucks baristas and other workers start a five-day strike to protest a lack of progress in contract negotiations with the company Friday, Dec. 20, 2024, in Burbank, Calif.

successful with campaigns at some stores run by Apple, Trader Joe's and the outdoor equipment company REI.

But turning those wins into contracts can be a challenge. At Amazon and Starbucks, which were not unionized

before the pandemic, workers have yet to secure an agreement with the e-commerce and coffee giants, which both have their headquarters in Seattle.

John Logan, director of labour and employment studies at San Francisco State University, said he thinks the Amazon and Starbucks workers are "desperate" to make progress before President-elect Donald Trump gets to appoint a Republican majority to the National Labor Relations Board, which is expected to be less friendly to unions during his administration.

"The unions want to make these disputes public and bring political pressures on the companies," Logan said in a written statement. "If these disputes drag on until next year, and if they are fought largely through the labour board and the courts, the unions and workers will almost certainly lose. This might be their last, best chance to pressure the companies in public before Trump comes into office."

PRISM

Overdue book returned to library after 30 years

London: A library book that has been overdue for more than three decades was finally returned to the U.K. library where it belongs.

The Crediton Library posted about the late return on their Facebook page Thursday.

"We are very grateful to anonymous borrower who posted us back our copy of Thomas's ABC this week," the post says. "We checked the date label and note that this book was slightly overdue by 31.5 years."

The library included two photos with their post. One showed the book's cover, and an envelope with no return address.

The other image shows the borrowing card, with the last stamp dated Mar. 25, 1993.

Virginia home gets owl tree-topper

Virginia: A Christmas tree in Virginia got a special tree-topper when a Barred Owl entered the home Thursday.

The Animal Welfare League of Arlington posted two photos of the bird on Facebook.

"This beautiful Barred Owl decided to play Santa and drop in — literally — through the chimney of a local home, and declared himself the newest star on top of their Christmas tree," officials wrote in the caption.

"Look closely - you'll see he knocked the old star over to make room for himself," they added.

Agencies

TODAY IN HISTORY

- 69– Vespasian is proclaimed Emperor of Rome; his predecessor, Vitellius, attempts to abdicate but is captured and killed at the Gemonian stairs.
- 401– Pope Innocent I is elected, the only pope to succeed his father in the office.
- 856– Damghan earthquake: An earthquake near the Persian city of Damghan kills an estimated 200,000 people, the sixth deadliest earthquake in recorded history.
- 880– Luoyang, eastern capital of the Tang dynasty, is captured by rebel leader Huang Chao during the reign of Emperor Xizong.
- 1135– Three weeks after the death of King Henry I of England, Stephen of Blois claims the throne and is privately crowned King of England, beginning the English Anarchy.



A view of Nigale Bazaar under Mude-Charikot road section of Sindhupalchok district.

PHOTO: SAGAR BASNET/TRN

'LUMBINI CIRCUIT TO BE DEVELOPED FOR TOURISM PROMOTION'

RSS
Lumbini, Dec. 21

CHIEF MINISTER OF LUMBINI PROVINCE CHIEF NARAYAN ACHARYA HAS SAID LUMBINI AND BUDDHIST CIRCUIT WOULD BE DEVELOPED FOR THE PROMOTION OF TOURISM SITES.

INAUGURATING THE GAUTAM BUDDHA NATIONAL GARDEN FESTIVAL ORGANISED AT DEVDAHA OF RUPANDEHI ON SATURDAY, CHIEF MINISTER ACHARYA SHARED THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS FORWARDED A CONCEPT OF CONNECTING RUPANDEHI, KAPILVASTU AND NAWALPARASI (WEST) WITH BUDDHIST CIRCUIT AND 12 DISTRICTS OF LUMBINI PROVINCE WITH LUMBINI CIRCUIT.

HE FURTHER SAID LUMBINI PROVINCE GOVERNMENT WOULD CONSTRUCT TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURES IN ORDER TO CONNECT HERITAGES FROM TILAKURAKOT TO RAMGRAM OF NAWALPARASI MAKING A MASTER PLAN OF BUDDHIST CIRCUIT.

THE CHIEF MINISTER SHARED THAT LUMBINI GOVERNMENT WAS COMMITTED TO DEVELOP TOURISM SITES IN LATEST WAY TO ATTRACT DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN TOURISTS.

HE LAID EMPHASIS ON THE NEED OF GIVING PRIORITY TO ARTISTIC DESIGN AND LOCAL TIMBER AND MATERIALS DISCOURAGING THE CEMENTED STRUCTURES IN THE GARDEN.

SHARING THAT 'LET'S VISIT BARDIYA' CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN LAUNCHED TO ATTRACT DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN TOURISTS IN BARDIYA, CM ACHARYA URGED TO MAKE A WIDE PUBLICITY OF THE CAMPAIGN.

BUDDHA COMMUNITY FOREST USERS' GROUP HAS MADE VARIOUS WOODEN STRUCTURES AND PUT THEM ON DISPLAY IN THE FESTIVAL WITH AN OBJECTIVE OF PROTECTING FORESTS, ENVIRONMENT AND BIO DIVERSITY AS WELL AS TOURISM PROMOTION.

NORAD's Santa tracker was a Cold War morale boost, now it attracts millions of kids

AP
USA, Dec. 21

THE CHRISTMAS TRADITION HAS BECOME NEARLY GLOBAL IN SCOPE: CHILDREN FROM AROUND THE WORLD TRACK SANTA CLAUS AS HE SWEEPS ACROSS THE EARTH, DELIVERING PRESENTS AND DEFYING TIME.

EACH YEAR, AT LEAST 100,000 KIDS CALL INTO THE NORTH AMERICAN AEROSPACE DEFENSE COMMAND TO INQUIRE ABOUT SANTA'S LOCATION. MILLIONS MORE FOLLOW ONLINE IN NINE LANGUAGES, FROM ENGLISH TO JAPANESE.

ON ANY OTHER NIGHT, NORAD IS SCANNING THE HEAVENS FOR POTENTIAL THREATS, SUCH AS LAST YEAR'S CHINESE SPY BALLOON. BUT ON CHRISTMAS EVE, VOLUNTEERS IN COLORADO SPRINGS ARE FIELDING QUESTIONS LIKE, "WHEN IS SANTA COMING TO MY HOUSE?" AND, "AM I ON THE NAUGHTY OR NICE LIST?"

"THERE ARE SCREAMS AND GIGGLES AND LAUGHTER," SAID BOB SOMMERS, 63, A CIVILIAN CONTRACTOR AND NORAD VOLUNTEER.

SOMMERS OFTEN SAYS ON THE CALL THAT EVERYONE MUST BE ASLEEP BEFORE SANTA ARRIVES, PROMPTING PARENTS TO SAY, "DO YOU HEAR WHAT HE SAID? WE GOT TO GO TO BED EARLY."

NORAD'S ANNUAL TRACKING OF SANTA HAS ENDURED SINCE THE COLD WAR, PRE-DATING UGLY SWEATER PARTIES AND MARIAH CAREY CLASSICS.

THE TRADITION CONTINUES REGARDLESS OF GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWNS, SUCH AS THE ONE IN 2018, AND THIS YEAR.

HERE'S HOW IT BEGAN AND WHY THE PHONES KEEP RINGING.

THE ORIGIN STORY IS HOLLYWOOD-ESQUE.

IT STARTED WITH A CHILD'S ACCIDENTAL PHONE CALL IN 1955. THE COLORADO SPRINGS NEWSPAPER PRINTED A SEARS ADVERTISEMENT THAT ENCOURAGED CHILDREN TO CALL

SANTA, LISTING A PHONE NUMBER.

A BOY CALLED. BUT HE REACHED THE CONTINENTAL AIR DEFENSE COMMAND, NOW NORAD, A JOINT U.S. AND CANADIAN EFFORT TO SPOT POTENTIAL ENEMY ATTACKS. TENSIONS WERE GROWING WITH THE SOVIET UNION, ALONG WITH ANXIETIES ABOUT NUCLEAR WAR.

MOTHER THAT SEARS MISTAKENLY PRINTED THE TOP-SECRET NUMBER. HE HUNG UP, BUT THE PHONE SOON RANG AGAIN WITH A YOUNG GIRL RECITING HER CHRISTMAS LIST. FIFTY CALLS A DAY FOLLOWED, HE SAID.

IN THE PRE-DIGITAL AGE, THE AGENCY USED A 60-BY-80 FOOT (18-BY-24 METER) PLEXIGLASS MAP OF NORTH AMERICA TO



FILE PHOTO

AIR FORCE COL. HARRY W. SHOUP PICKED UP AN EMERGENCY-ONLY "RED PHONE" AND WAS GREETED BY A TINY VOICE THAT BEGAN TO RECITE A CHRISTMAS WISH LIST.

"HE WENT ON A LITTLE BIT, AND HE TAKES A BREATH, THEN SAYS, 'HEY, YOU'RE NOT SANTA,'" SHOUP TOLD THE ASSOCIATED PRESS IN 1999.

REALIZING AN EXPLANATION WOULD BE LOST ON THE YOUNGSTER, SHOUP SUMMONED A DEEP, JOLLY VOICE AND REPLIED, "HO, HO, HO! YES, I AM SANTA CLAUS. HAVE YOU BEEN A GOOD BOY?"

SHOUP SAID HE LEARNED FROM THE BOY'S

TRACK UNIDENTIFIED OBJECTS. A STAFF MEMBER JOKINGLY DREW SANTA AND HIS SLEIGH OVER THE NORTH POLE. THE TRADITION WAS BORN.

"NOTE TO THE KIDDIES," BEGAN AN AP STORY FROM COLORADO SPRINGS ON DEC. 23, 1955. "SANTA CLAUS FRIDAY WAS ASSURED SAFE PASSAGE INTO THE UNITED STATES BY THE CONTINENTAL AIR DEFENSE COMMAND."

IN A LIKELY REFERENCE TO THE SOVIETS, THE ARTICLE NOTED THAT SANTA WAS GUARDED AGAINST POSSIBLE ATTACK FROM "THOSE WHO DO NOT BELIEVE IN CHRISTMAS."

Govt accelerates e-governance drive with...

Practice of e-governance services

ACCORDING TO DG PAUDYAL, E-GOVERNANCE SERVICES HAVE NOW BEEN APPLIED TO DIFFERENT PUBLIC OFFICES LIKE THE DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION WHERE PEOPLE CAN GET E-VISA PROCESSING ONLINE AND EVEN PAYMENT FOR THE SERVICE, ISSUANCE OF SMART LICENSE ALTHOUGH ITS USE IS YET TO COME INTO USE IN REAL SENSE, EMBOSSED NUMBER PLATE WITH PLANNING TO SURVEIL ALL VEHICLES PLYING ACROSS THE COUNTRY, COMPANY REGISTRAR'S OFFICE, AND EVEN ISSUANCE OF PRESS ACCREDITATION CARD FOR JOURNALISTS ONLINE, ETC., ARE FEW EXAMPLES OF APPLICATION OF E-GOVERNANCE. "BUT GOVERNMENT'S DREAM FOR DIGITALISATION OF ALL THESE SERVICES MAY STILL TAKE SOME YEARS TO HAVE ALL KINDS OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES IN THE HANDS AND INTERNET OF PUBLIC," SAID PAUDYAL.

DESPITE THE ACCESSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF TECHNOLOGY, IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO ASSUME THAT ANY TECHNOLOGY HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL. STAKEHOLDERS SAY THAT IT DEPENDS ON HOW EFFICIENT SUCH USE IS IN TERMS OF TIME AND COST. FOR EXAMPLE, THERE IS ACCESS TO RADIO AND TELEVISION IN EVERY HOUSEHOLD, BUT PEOPLE HAVE SHIFTED TO INTERNET TECHNOLOGY FOR INFORMATION AND ENTERTAINMENT. VOICE CALLS ARE ACCESSIBLE EVERYWHERE, BUT PEOPLE

HAVE STARTED TALKING THROUGH MEANS LIKE WHATSAPP AND VIBER. EXPERTS SAID THAT DESPITE ACCESSIBILITY, THE SUSTAINABILITY OF ANY TECHNOLOGY DEPENDS ON THE EFFICIENCY.

BUAY LIMBU SENIHANG, CEO OF VAIRAV TECH AND CYBERSECURITY EXPERT, SAID THAT IT IS TRUE THAT THE COUNTRY IS IN PRE-DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION ERA, AND IT IS EASY TO TALK ABOUT E-GOVERNANCE AND DIGITALISATION, BUT IN REAL SENSE THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF IS UNKNOWN ABOUT WHICH SECTOR SHOULD BE STEERED INTO COMPLETE DIGITALISATION PHASE.

"ALTHOUGH MANY THINGS HAVE ALREADY BEEN SET UP IN THE IT AND COMMUNICATION SECTORS FROM THE GOVERNMENT, THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT STILL LACKS SPECIFIC PRIORITISATION IN THE IT SECTOR TO MAKE ONE PARTICULAR SECTOR AS FULLY DIGITAL," SAID LIMBU.

FOR EXAMPLE, TOURISM, HEALTH, AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY HAVE HUGE POTENTIAL IN TERMS OF REVENUE GENERATION, BUT THE GOVERNMENT HAS NOT PRIORITISED THESE SECTORS TO MAKE THEM FULLY DIGITAL SO THAT PEOPLE FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY GET SERVICE ANYTIME AND FROM ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD.

ANOTHER PROBLEM IN IT AND E-GOVERNANCE IS THAT GOVERNMENT HURRIES IN

LAUNCHING AND BRINGING ANY NEW TECHNOLOGY IN NEPAL AND TESTING IT IN PUBLIC SERVICE SECTORS LIKE IN PASSPORT, DRIVING LICENSE AND INDUSTRY AND COMPANY REGISTRATION OFFICE, BUT THE DIGITAL SYSTEM ADOPTED IN PARTICULAR OFFICES LACKS SUSTAINABILITY OF OPERATION FOR 24 HOURS. LET'S SAY IF ANYONE VISITS SUCH OFFICES, THEY MAY NOT GET THE SERVICE IN DIGITAL PLATFORM, COURTESY SERVER DOWN OR SYSTEM DOWN," SAID LIMBU.

"IT SEEMS THAT THERE IS A LACK OF A DETAILED FRAMEWORK AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FROM THE GOVERNMENT REGARDING THE TYPE OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION REQUIRED IN SECTORS SUCH AS EDUCATION, HEALTHCARE, INSURANCE, TRANSPORTATION, INDUSTRY, AND AGRICULTURE IN OUR COUNTRY," HE SAID.

AS A RESULT, OUR GOVERNMENT OFFICES PROVIDING PUBLIC SERVICES OFTEN APPEAR DISORGANISED AND CHAOTIC, HE SAID.

IN NEPAL, TECHNOLOGIES ARE BEING IMPLEMENTED WITHOUT PROPER INFRASTRUCTURE, LAWS, AND POLICIES IN PLACE. FOR EXAMPLE, THE NATIONAL IDENTITY CARD HAS BEEN INTRODUCED, BUT THE CURRENT CONSTITUTION DOES NOT RECOGNISE IT AS EQUIVALENT TO CITIZENSHIP. THEREFORE, ITS IMPLEMENTATION REMAINS UNCERTAIN, SAID LIMBU.

Yoga and meditation should...

"EVEN IF PEOPLE POSSESS SIMILAR INTELLIGENCE, IF THEIR MINDS ARE CORRUPT, IT WILL NOT LEAD TO SUCCESS. WHAT PEOPLE TRULY NEED IS DECENCY, HUMILITY, AND A LACK OF PRIDE," HE ADDED.

THE PRIME MINISTER FURTHER EXPLAINED THAT TRUE HUMAN HAPPINESS CAN BE ACHIEVED ONLY IF INDIVIDUALS APPLY THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND INTELLIGENCE WITH A RIGHT AND DISCIPLINED MINDSET. "JESUITS TEACH DISCIPLINE AND INSPIRE PEOPLE TO MAINTAIN POSITIVE MORALE THROUGH RESPECT FOR OTHERS. THEY DO NOT ENCOURAGE ARROGANCE OR ABUSE, BUT RATHER A COMMITMENT TO PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT. THESE VALUES ARE CRUCIAL

Earthquake damages 16...

DATA COLLECTION EFFORTS ARE UNDERWAY TO DOCUMENT THE EXTENT OF THE DAMAGE.

THE DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION OFFICE IN BAJURA SAID THAT THE EARTHQUAKE'S EFFECTS WERE FELT IN VARIOUS PARTS OF THE DISTRICT, WITH SEVERAL OLD AND DETERIORATED HOUSES SUSTAINING DAMAGE.

CHIEF DISTRICT OFFICER MEGH NATH PADHYA, WHO ALSO SERVES AS THE COORDINATOR OF THE DISTRICT DISASTER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE, STRESSED THAT EFFORTS ARE ONGOING TO GATHER DATA ON

Govt preparing to print govt documents within nation

BY PHADINDRA ADHIKARI
Lekhath, Dec. 21



Minister Prithvi Subba Gurung

MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, PRITHVI SUBBA GURUNG, ANNOUNCED THAT VARIOUS GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS AND IDENTITY CARDS WILL SOON BE PRINTED IN NEPAL.

HE SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS PREPARING TO PRINT PASSPORTS, DRIVING LICENSES, BANKNOTES, TOLL STICKERS AND OTHER DOCUMENTS DOMESTICALLY.

SPEAKING AT A PROGRAMME ORGANISED AT BARAH SECONDARY SCHOOL IN MACHHAPUCHHIRE-6, KASKI, MINISTER GURUNG EMPHASISED THE NEED FOR PRINTING THESE MATERIALS IN NEPAL TO ENHANCE SECURITY AND REDUCE COSTS. "CURRENTLY, MOST GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS AND IDENTITY CARDS ARE PRINTED ABROAD.

WE AIM TO PRINT PASSPORTS IN NEPAL WITHIN THE NEXT YEAR. WE WILL ALSO WORK TOWARDS PRINTING BANKNOTES DOMESTICALLY," HE SAID.

THE MINISTER ALSO ADDRESSED THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE, NOTING THAT THE COUNTRY'S TWO MAJOR PARTIES HAD COME TOGETHER TO PREVENT FURTHER CHAOS AND INSTABILITY.

"IN THE PAST FIVE MONTHS SINCE THE FORMATION OF THE GOVERNMENT, THERE HAVE NOT BEEN MAJOR CHANGES, BUT WE HAVE STARTED THE JOURNEY TOWARDS PROSPERITY BY IDENTIFYING THE COUNTRY'S CHALLENGES," SAID MINISTER GURUNG.

MINISTER GURUNG EXPLAINED THAT, IN THE PAST, THE COUNTRY HAD FACED INTERNAL TURMOIL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. "THE UML AND CONGRESS HAVE JOINED FORCES TO PREVENT THE COUNTRY FROM FALLING INTO FAILURE DUE TO ANARCHISTS, RADICAL LEFTISTS AND FOREIGN INTERFERENCE," HE ADDED. REFLECTING ON THE SUCCESS OF THE MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES IN LEADING SIGNIFICANT MOVEMENTS AND REVOLUTIONS, HE STRESSED THE NEED FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS TO PAVE THE WAY FOR SOCIALISM.

DESPITE THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS, GURUNG WARNED AGAINST COMPLACENCY. "VISIBLE PROGRESS WILL BE MADE IN THE REMAINING TIME," SAID MINISTER GURUNG.

AS THE GOVERNMENT SPOKESPERSON, HE

ALSO POINTED OUT THAT ONLY ABOUT 30 PERCENT OF THE DEVELOPMENT BUDGET IS TYPICALLY SPENT, AND THAT CITIZENS' EXPECTATIONS WOULD NOT BE MET UNLESS THIS TREND CHANGES.

"WE MUST MOVE FORWARD BY CHANGING LAWS, REGULATIONS AND POLICIES. THE DEVELOPMENT AND PROSPERITY OF THE REPUBLIC CANNOT BE ACHIEVED WITH THE LAWS AND REGULATIONS FROM KING MAHENDRA'S ERA," HE ADDED.

THE MINISTER ALSO HIGHLIGHTED THAT THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IS WORKING TO PROVIDE ACCESS TO QUALITY INTERNET, AS WELL AS TO EXPAND THE REACH OF NEPAL TELEVISION AND RADIO NEPAL ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

ADDRESSING ISSUES IN THE EDUCATIONAL SECTOR, MINISTER GURUNG SUGGESTED THAT GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS SHOULD BEGIN OFFERING SCHOOL BUS SERVICES AND DORMITORIES.

MINISTER GURUNG ALSO POINTED OUT THAT NEPAL FACES CHALLENGES IN NEARLY EVERY SECTOR, INCLUDING EDUCATION, HEALTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE, BUT SOLUTIONS ARE BEING SOUGHT. "RADICAL CHANGES ARE NECESSARY IN SECTORS LIKE EDUCATION, HEALTH AND AGRICULTURE. INSTEAD OF PRODUCING EDUCATED BUT UNEMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS, WE NEED TO START PREPARING SKILLED, CAPABLE AND COMPETITIVE HUMAN RESOURCES," HE SAID.

BARAH SECONDARY SCHOOL, ESTABLISHED IN 1967, HAS BEEN OFFERING VETERINARY MEDICINE COURSES AT THE PLUS TWO LEVEL. SCHOOL PRESIDENT ASHMAN ROKA EMPHASISED THE IMPORTANCE OF STRONG GOVERNMENT AND PARENTAL SUPPORT TO SUSTAIN RURAL SCHOOLS. THE SCHOOL ALSO CELEBRATED THE SILVER JUBILEE OF ITS VETERINARY PROGRAMME ON SATURDAY.

Forest covering area increases by 0.75 percent

RSS
Kathmandu, Dec. 21

THE FOREST COVER IN THE COUNTRY HAS INCREASED BY 0.75 PERCENT IN 2022 AS COMPARED TO 2019, ACCORDING TO A STUDY REPORT. THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED JOINTLY BY THE FOREST RESEARCH AND TRAINING CENTER (FRTC) UNDER THE MINISTRY OF FORESTS AND ENVIRONMENT AND THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR INTEGRATED MOUNTAIN DEVELOPMENT (ICIMOD).

THE REPORT SHOWS THAT IN 2022, 19 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL LAND AREA IN NEPAL IS COVERED BY ROCKS, SNOW, GLACIERS, OTHER WOODED LAND, RIVERINE WASTELAND, BUILT-UP AREA, WATER AND OPEN LAND.

FRTC DIRECTOR GENERAL DR RAJENDRA KC SAID THAT AREA UNDER FOREST AND OTHER WOODED LAND IN NEPAL IN 2022 WAS 46.08 PERCENT (6 MILLION 797 THOUSAND 257 HECTARES). THE AREA IN THIS CATEGORY IN 2019 WAS 45.33 PERCENT (6 MILLION 686 THOUSAND 828 HECTARES). DURING THAT PERIOD THE AREA UNDER OTHER WOODED LAND WAS FOUND TO HAVE DECREASED.

LAUNCHING THE STUDY REPORT, DIRECTOR GENERAL KC SAID THE OTHER WOODED

LAND AND SOME CULTIVABLE LAND HAS BEEN FOUND TRANSFORMED INTO FOREST LAND.

ACCORDING TO HIM, THE REAL-TIME AND PERIODIC DATA ON LAND COVER CHANGE INCLUDED IN THE REPORT WOULD BE PROVIDED TO THE VARIOUS NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS CONCERNED.

HE ADDED THAT THE MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE REPORT WAS TO PROVIDE REGULAR AND CREDIBLE INFORMATION ON THE FOREST AREA OF THE COUNTRY TO THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS CONCERNED.

THE FRTC DIRECTOR GENERAL ALSO BELIEVED THAT THE REPORT WILL PROVE TO BE AN IMPORTANT DOCUMENT IN FORMULATING PRACTICAL STRATEGIC PLAN RELATED TO FORESTS AND VARIOUS RESEARCHES AS WELL AS IN MAINTAINING COORDINATION DOE THE DEVELOPMENT OF FORESTS AND RELATED AREAS.

ACCORDING TO DIRECTOR GENERAL KC, THE AGRICULTURE LAND AREA WAS 65.4 PERCENT IN THE TARAI IN 2022. SIMILARLY, THE FOREST COVER WAS 73.67 PERCENT IN CHURE, 64.54 PERCENT IN THE MID-HILLS REGION AND 57.20 PERCENT IN MOUNTAINOUS REGION IN 2022.

"THE LARGEST AREA 41.59 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL AREA IN THE MOUNTAINOUS REGION IS COVERED BY GRASSLAND. THE STUDY SHOWS THAT THE FOREST AREA HAS INCREASED IN THE TARAI, CHURE AND MID-HILLY REGIONS," HE ADDED.

DEATH TOLL FROM CYCLONE CHIDO RISES TO 76 IN MOZAMBIQUE

AFP
Mozambique, Dec. 21

CYCLONE CHIDO, WHICH RAVAGED THE FRENCH ARCHIPELAGO OF MAYOTTE, HAS CLAIMED 76 LIVES IN MOZAMBIQUE, THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF RISK AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT SAID SATURDAY.

CHIDO MADE LANDFALL IN MOZAMBIQUE ON SUNDAY AFTER TEARING THROUGH THE INDIAN OCEAN ISLAND OF MAYOTTE WHERE HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE ARE FEARED TO HAVE BEEN KILLED. THE CYCLONE STRUCK MOZAMBIQUE AT THE NORTHERN CABO DELGADO PROVINCE AND DESTROYED NEARLY 62,000 HOMES, ACCORDING TO OFFICIALS.

"SHELTER, FOOD AND NON-FOOD ITEMS (NFI) - PARTICULARLY HYGIENE KITS, DIGNITY KITS, SOAP AND MOSQUITO NETS ARE IDENTIFIED AS BEING THE MOST URGENT NEEDS FOR THE AFFECTED POPULATION," THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF MIGRATION SAID IN A STATEMENT.

Minister Pandey urges all three levels of govt to preserve cultural heritage

BY KEDARTIMSINA
Banepa, Dec. 21

MINISTER FOR CULTURE, TOURISM AND CIVIL AVIATION BADRI PRASAD PANDEY HAS EMPHASISED THE NEED FOR COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION AMONG ALL THREE LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT TO PRESERVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE.

DURING THE 300TH WEEK OF THE TRIVENI CLEANLINESS CAMPAIGN, INITIATED BY THE KAVRELI ACTIVE WOMEN'S ORGANISATION IN PANAUTI ON SATURDAY, MINISTER PANDEY STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY IN SAFEGUARDING ARCHAEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE.

"NEPAL IS CULTURALLY DIVERSE. TEMPLES ARE SYMBOLS OF OUR CIVILIZATION AND CULTURE. WE ARE RICH BECAUSE OF OUR DIVERSE CULTURES. CLEANLINESS IS ESSENTIAL FOR PROTECTING AND PROMOTING HERITAGE LINKED WITH OUR CULTURE," SAID MINISTER PANDEY. "IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR ANY SINGLE LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAFEGUARDING HERITAGE. NO SINGLE ORGANISATION, BODY OR GROUP CAN DO IT ALONE. IT REQUIRES COLLECTIVE EFFORT. THERE MUST BE COORDINATION AND COOPERATION AMONG THE FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS REGARDING THE PRESERVATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND RECONSTRUCTION OF HERITAGE. LIKEWISE, LOCAL COMMUNITIES MUST ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE."

THE MINISTER ALSO POINTED OUT THE NEED FOR COORDINATION AMONG ALL THREE LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF HERITAGE DAMAGED BY FLOODS AND LANDSLIDES. HE SAID THAT CLEANLINESS CAMPAIGNS CANNOT SUCCEED SOLELY THROUGH THE EFFORTS OF SPECIAL GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS. FOR PROPER WASTE MANAGEMENT, INDIVIDUALS MUST THEMSELVES



Minister for Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Badri Prasad Pandey addressing a programme at Banepa.

BECOME AWARE AND RESPONSIBLE. REFERRING TO THE BAGMATI CLEANLINESS MEGA CAMPAIGN, HE SAID THAT IT HAD RAISED PUBLIC AWARENESS ABOUT CLEANLINESS, LEADING TO NUMEROUS SIMILAR CAMPAIGNS ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

SINCE 2018, THE KAVRELI ACTIVE WOMEN'S ORGANISATION HAS BEEN ORGANISING WEEKLY CLEANLINESS PROGRAMMES EVERY SATURDAY

AT THE HISTORIC, CULTURAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIVENI GHAT IN PANAUTI. SUMITRA ACHARYA BANJARA, CHAIRPERSON OF THE ORGANISATION AND COORDINATOR OF THE CLEANLINESS CAMPAIGN, SAID THAT THE TRIVENI CLEANLINESS CAMPAIGN WAS INSPIRED BY THE BAGMATI CLEANLINESS MEGA CAMPAIGN. SHE STRESSED THE NEED FOR THE SUPPORT OF ALL BODIES AND INDIVIDUALS TO MAKE THE CAMPAIGN

SUCCESSFUL. NEPALI CONGRESS CENTRAL MEMBER MADHU PRASAD ACHARYA, PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY MEMBER KANCHAN CHANDRA BADE AND TIRTHA LAMA, DISTRICT COORDINATION CHIEF DEEPAK KUMAR GAUTAM, PANAUTI MUNICIPALITY MAYOR RAM SHARAN BHANDARI, DEPUTY MAYOR GEETA BANJARA AND OTHERS WERE PRESENT ON THE OCCASION.

Over 200 artists play Dhime Baja and perform dance in Dharan



PHOTO: TRN

Over 200 artists performing Newari dance in Dharan.

BY NISHA RAI
Dharan, Dec. 21

FOR THE FIRST TIME OUTSIDE KATHMANDU, DHARAN HOSTED A HISTORIC LARGE-SCALE JOINT DHIME BAJA (A TRADITIONAL NEPALESE DRUM OF THE NEWAR COMMUNITY) AND DHIME DANCE PERFORMANCE, ALONG WITH A CULTURAL EXHIBITION.

THE EVENT, NAMED YOMARI (A DELICACY OF THE NEWAR COMMUNITY) 2024, WAS HELD IN COLLABORATION WITH WARD-3 OF DHARAN SUB-METROPOLITAN CITY AND PASA KHALA DHARAN.

MORE THAN 200 ARTISTS PERFORMED

THE JOINT DHIME BAJA AND DANCE AT THE EVENT.

THE PROGRAMME WAS ORGANISED WITH THE AIM OF PRESERVING THE CENTURY-OLD TRADITION OF YOMARI AND NEWAR CUISINE, ALONG WITH PASSING ON DHIME BAJA AND NEWAR DANCES TO THE NEW GENERATION, WHILE MAKING A POSITIVE IMPACT ON SOCIETY, SAID COORDINATOR AMRIT ACHARYA. THE EVENT WAS DIRECTED BY SUDAN MUKHAR.

IN ADDITION TO THE JOINT DHIME BAJA AND DANCE, THE CELEBRATION FEATURED CULTURAL PERFORMANCES, INCLUDING THE LAKHE DANCE AND THAKTHUKE DANCE (TRADITIONAL STICK DANCE OF NEWAR COMMUNITY), ALONG WITH YOMARI, WHICH WAS

PREPARED IN EVERY HOUSEHOLD.

THE EVENT WAS ORGANISED TO PROMOTE TOURISM AND PRESERVE CULTURAL PRACTICES, ACHARYA ADDED.

YOMARI PURNIMA IS A FESTIVAL CELEBRATED BY THE NEWAR COMMUNITY ON THE FULL MOON DAY OF THE WINTER MONTH.

YOMARI IS MADE FROM NEW-HARVEST RICE FLOUR AND FILLED WITH CHAKU (MOLASSES) AND SESAME SEEDS AND IT IS NUTRITIOUS WHICH HELPS TO KEEP ONE WARM. IT IS ALSO A SYMBOL OF WEALTH AND PROSPERITY.

THE FESTIVAL ALSO MARKS THE END OF RICE HARVEST. THE FESTIVAL HOLDS SIGNIFICANT IMPORTANCE FOR THE NEWAR COMMUNITY.

'GRAVY DAY' IS AN AUSTRALIAN TRADITION

AP
New York, Dec. 21

TO MANY AUSTRALIANS, SATURDAY IS MORE THAN JUST DEC. 21. IT'S "GRAVY DAY," ALL BECAUSE OF A LYRIC IN ONE OF THE MOST UNLIKELY CHRISTMAS SONGS EVER WRITTEN.

"HOW TO MAKE GRAVY," WRITTEN BY SINGER PAUL KELLY, HAS BECOME A HOLIDAY CLASSIC IN AUSTRALIA OVER THE PAST FEW DECADES. IT WAS CITED THIS WEEK BY THE NATION'S PRIME MINISTER, ANTHONY ALBANESE, AS HE ANNOUNCED A DECISION TO RELEASE FIVE DRUG SMUGGLERS FROM PRISON, AND IS THE SUBJECT OF A NEW MOVIE THAT CREATES A STORY BEHIND THE SONG.

"IT HAS BECOME OUR MOST-LOVED CHRISTMAS SONG," JEFF JENKINS, OF THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLICATION THE MUSIC, WROTE THIS WEEK.

THE STORY IS SET IN A PRISON, THE LYRICS COMING FROM A LETTER AN INMATE WRITES TO HIS BROTHER TO PASS ALONG A RECIPE FOR THE FAMILY'S CHRISTMAS DINNER. THE SONG IS ABOUT MUCH MORE, THOUGH, AS "JOE" EXPRESSES REGRET, LONGING, FEAR, PARANOIA, SOME HUMOR AND THE NEAR-UNIVERSAL HOLIDAY EMOTION OF SOMEONE WHO WISHES TO BE SOMEWHERE ELSE.

THE PRISONER IS WRITING, AS THE SONG SAYS IN ITS SECOND LINE, ON THE 21ST OF DECEMBER, "AND NOW THEY'RE RINGING THE LAST BELLS."

Kehlani shares how taking risks earned Grammy noms

AP
Los Angeles, Dec. 21

WHILE RECORDING "CRASH," KEHLANI FACED A CAREER-DEFINING DECISION: STICK WITH THE FAMILIAR R&B SOUND THAT HELPED BUILD THE SINGER'S NAME, OR RISK IT ALL TO SHOWCASE THEIR FULL ARTISTIC RANGE.

FOR KEHLANI, WHO USES SHE/THEY PRONOUNS, CHOOSING THE LATTER WAS A GAMBLE, BUT TRUSTING THEIR INSTINCTS PAID OFF IN THE LONG RUN. THEIR FOURTH STUDIO ALBUM BECAME A CATALYST TO EARNING GRAMMY NODS, A MASSIVE WORLD TOUR AND PROVING THAT THEIR VERSATILITY SHOULD NEVER BE IN QUESTION.

"I WAS TAKING A RISK, BECAUSE I'M ONE OF THOSE ARTISTS THAT HAVE BEEN AROUND LONG ENOUGH FOR PEOPLE TO PIGEONHOLE ME INTO A SOUND," SAID KEHLANI, WHO FIRST REALIZED SHE WAS BEING CORNERED MUSICALLY AFTER RELEASING THE SINGLE "BUTTERFLY" FROM THEIR 2019 MIXTAPE "WHILE WE WAIT." THOUGH SHE LOVED THE TRACK, CALLING IT A "REALLY PRETTY SONG," SHE FELT A GROWING NEED TO BREAK OUT OF THE BOX AND EVOLVE THEIR SOUND.

KEHLANI PUSHED GENRE BOUNDARIES ON "CRASH," BLENDING ELEMENTS OF R&B, ROCK, DANCE FLOOR, RAP AND COUNTRY. THEIR BOLD EXPERIMENTATION EARNED THREE GRAMMY NOMINATIONS: BEST R&B PROGRESSIVE ALBUM FOR "CRASH," R&B SONG THROUGH THE VIRAL SENSATION TRACK "AFTER HOURS" AND BEST MELODIC RAP PERFORMANCE FOR "KEHLANI."

IN A RECENT INTERVIEW WITH THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, KEHLANI DISCUSSED CREATING THE DANCE COMMUNITY FOR "AFTER HOURS" GOING VIRAL, HOW THEIR PRO-PALESTINIAN STANCE IMPACTED THEM PERSONALLY, THEIR CHRISTMAS SONG WITH GLO RILLA, AND HOW EMBRACING A ROCK STAR PERSONA FOR "CRASH" CHALLENGED THEIR HEALTH BUT UNLOCKED A CREATIVE BREAKTHROUGH FOR THE ALBUM.

Exploring Kehlani's various musical reflections

KEHLANI'S MUSIC MIRRORS THEIR MENTAL STATE. WHILE RECORDING "CRASH," SHE FULLY EMBRACED A ROCK STAR LIFESTYLE, STAYING UP ALL NIGHT AND DRINKING ALCOHOL. IT CERTAINLY WASN'T CONDUCTIVE FOR THEIR HEALTH, BUT AT TIMES, THIS LED TO SOME INTENSE, MANIC BURSTS OF "EXPRESSION AND UNDERSTANDING," WHICH DEFINED THE ALBUM.

"THAT'S WHAT I THINK HAD TO COME OUT OF ME IN ORDER FOR 'CRASH' TO COME OUT OF ME IN THAT WAY," SAID KEHLANI, WHO NOTED THAT ALL THE "CHAOS" DELIVERED ON THE ALBUM WASN'T ALWAYS NEGATIVE. SHE RECORDED SONGS IN DIFFERENT AIRBNB LOCATIONS INCLUDING FROM A HOUSE IN SAN DIEGO, WHERE SHE COULD SLEEP EVERY DAY; FOUND THEIR GRUNGE SOUND WHILE GOING OUT IN HARLEM; AND EXHUED THEIR CONFIDENCE WHILE SHE LAID DOWN



TRACKS ON VACATION IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC.

"IT WAS A ROCK STAR ALBUM MADE IN A VERY ROCK STAR PROCESS," SAID KEHLANI, WHOSE APPROACH WAS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT THAN THEIR 2022 RELEASE "BLUE WATER ROAD," WHERE SHE WAS FOCUSED MORE ON MEDITATION, LEAVING THEM IN A SPIRITUALLY ENGINEERED SPACE.

THESE DAYS, KEHLANI HAS FOUND MIDDLE GROUND THROUGH ISOLATION AND A HEALTHIER LIFESTYLE. SHE NOW WORKS OUT LIKE A "NINJA WARRIOR," HITTING THE GYM MULTIPLE TIMES A DAY, DOING YOGA AND HIKING UP MOUNTAINS AND INCORPORATING HEALTHIER EATING HABITS.

THAT HELPED KEHLANI CREATE THE MIXTAPE "WHILE WE WAIT 2," WHICH RELEASED A COUPLE MONTHS AFTER "CRASH." IT TOOK ONLY TWO WEEKS TO RECORD THEIR LATEST MIXTAPE INSIDE THEIR BACKYARD HOUSE WHILE WEARING PJAMAS.

"THE MUSIC I MAKE WILL ALWAYS REFLECT EXACTLY WHERE I'M AT IN MY MENTAL HEALTH JOURNEY," SHE SAID.

Dance community contributes to Kehlani's viral song

KEHLANI CREDITS THE MASSIVE SUCCESS OF "AFTER HOURS" TO THE DANCE COMMUNITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA, THANKS TO DARIUS HICKMAN, WHO WAS BEHIND THE INFECTIOUS DANCE CHALLENGE.

THE SINGER SAID MUSICIANS OWE GRATITUDE TO DANCERS LIKE HICKMAN, WHOSE VIDEO POST EARLIER THIS YEAR GAINED MORE THAN 3.3 MILLION VIEWS ON TIKTOK. THE POST SHOWED HICKMAN DANCING TO THE INTRO OF "AFTER HOURS."

"DANCERS ARE LIKE THE NEW DJS," SHE SAID. "THEY ARE BREAKING SONGS."

KEHLANI OFTEN SHOWS THEIR GRATITUDE TO THE MANY WHO LOOPED "AFTER HOURS" INTO THEIR DANCE VIDEOS. SHE TAGGED HICKMAN ON THEIR OWN SOCIAL MEDIA, ACCEPTING THE DANCE CHALLENGE.

"IT JUST FEELS GOOD AND IT BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER," SHE SAID. "SO WHEN I NOTICED THAT IT WAS ACTUALLY DOING IT IN REAL TIME, I WAS LIKE, 'OK, IT'S BEYOND ME NOW.' I REALLY OWE IT TO THE DANCERS REALLY."

Kehlani and GloRilla bring holiday cheer with a trap music twist

KEHLANI DABBLED IN CHRISTMAS MUSIC NEARLY A DECADE AGO WITH A FEW LOW-KEY SOUNDCloud TRACKS. BUT THIS YEAR, SHE'S GIVING THE HOLIDAYS A BOLD NEW TWIST BY COLLABORATING WITH RAPPER GLO RILLA ON "XMAS TIME," WHICH FLIPS THE SCRIPT ON TRADITIONAL CAROLS.

"I NEVER IMAGINED I'D BE ON A TRAP CHRISTMAS SONG," SAID KEHLANI, WHO NOTED THAT SHE DIDN'T THINK TWICE WHEN GLO RILLA'S TEAM REACHED OUT ABOUT TEAMING UP ON THE FESTIVE, BASS-THUMPING TRACK THAT RELEASED LAST WEEK.

"I'M SUCH A FAN OF GLO RILLA IN ANY SHAPE, WAY OR FORM," SHE SAID. "SHE COULDN'T SAY SHE WAS MAKING AN EASTER SONG AND I WOULD'VE BEEN LIKE 'FANTASTIC. GIRL, LET'S DO IT.'"

How Kehlani managed mental health while being a Palestinian supporter

DESPITE WARNINGS TO PROTECT THEIR CAREER, KEHLANI USED THEIR MUSIC AND PLATFORM TO BOLDLY SUPPORT

PALESTINIANS, MARCHING ALONGSIDE THOUSANDS AT A PRO-PALESTINIAN RALLY IN LOS ANGELES LAST YEAR.

HOROSCOPE

TAROT.COM

ARIES: ACHIEVING BALANCE REQUIRES ONGOING EFFORT. IT'S PERFECTLY NATURAL FOR YOUR LIFE TO OCCASIONALLY FALL A LITTLE OUT OF WHACK, BUT WITH THE MOON ENTERING YOUR FAIR-MINDED 7TH HOUSE, YOU'VE GOT A CHANCE TO GET EVERYTHING BACK ON AN EVEN KEEL.

CANCER: HUNKER DOWN AND GET COMFORTABLE. THE MOON IS SPENDING THE DAY DRIFTING INTO YOUR PROTECTIVE 4TH HOUSE, SO YOU CAN FEEL MOST AT HOME BY LITERALLY KEEPING CLOSE TO HOME.

LIBRA: IT'S ALL SYSTEMS GO FOR YOU TODAY. YOUR TURN TO GO HAS ARRIVED, JUST LIKE THE MOON IS ARRIVING IN YOUR MOTIVATIONAL 1ST HOUSE. THIS SETS YOU UP FOR A FRESH LUNAR CYCLE AND AN OPPORTUNITY TO PURSUE YOUR GOALS WITH FRESH FIRE IN YOUR TANK.

CAPRICORN: GO FOR GOLD, CAPRICORN! YOU'RE IN YOUR ELEMENT AS THE MOON STRIDES INTO YOUR MAGNIFICENT 10TH HOUSE, WHEREIN YOUR RESPONSIBLE SIGN CAN DO GREAT THINGS.

TAURUS: THERE IS A RHYME AND REASON TO EVERYTHING. YOU CAN TAP INTO THIS UNDERSTATED EFFICIENCY AS THE MOON ENTERS YOUR 6TH HOUSE OF PROCEDURE, ALIGNING YOUR ENERGY WITH THAT OF THE UNIVERSE FOR MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY.

LEO: ONE THING AFTER ANOTHER WILL BE DEMANDING YOUR ATTENTION AS THE MOON STUMBLES INTO YOUR BUSY 3RD HOUSE, SO YOU'LL WANT TO TRY AND MAINTAIN SOME SENSE OF ORGANIZATION -- OR ELSE YOU MIGHT WIND UP FEELING LIKE YOU HAVEN'T HAD A VERY PRODUCTIVE DAY.

SCORPIO: CLOCKING OUT FROM REALITY, EVEN IF ONLY FOR A LITTLE WHILE, IS A GREAT IDEA. THE MOON IS SETTLING DOWN IN YOUR RESTFUL 12TH HOUSE, WHERE IT'S GIVING YOU THE COSMIC CUE TO TAKE IT EASY.

AQUARIUS: THE MOON IS FLUTING INTO YOUR HIGH-MINDED 9TH HOUSE, OFFERING YOU A GLOWING LIGHT TOWARD BROADER HORIZONS AND EXPLORATIONS OF ALL THINGS FRESH AND NEW. THIS SECTOR IS ALL ABOUT FURTHERING YOUR EDUCATIONAL LIBERALITY AND METAPHORICALITY.

GEMINI: THIS IS AN INNATELY CREATIVE SECTOR, SO IF YOU'VE GOT AN ARTISTIC SIDE, LET IT OUT TO PLAY! THAT SAID, THE GALACTIC FOCUS IS ON THE PROCESS AND NOT THE RESULTS, SO EVEN THE LEAST ARTISTICALLY INCLINED AMONG YOU SHOULD ENJOY MESSING AROUND CREATIVELY.

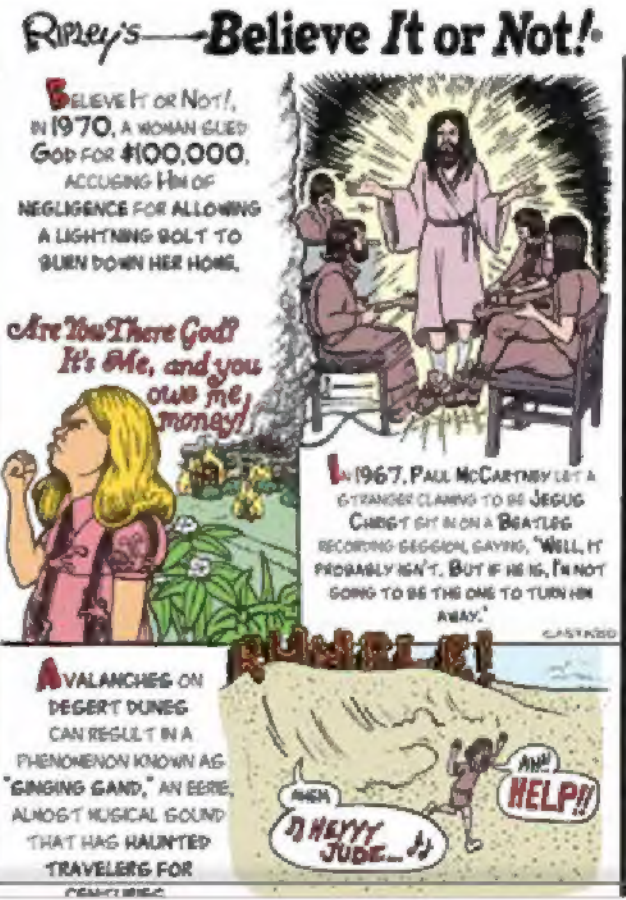
VIRGO: HEED THE DANGER OF THROWING YOUR MONEY AROUND LIKE CONFETTI. IT'S CERTAINLY TEMPTING TO INDULGE YOUR SENSES BY WAY OF YOUR WALLET WHILE THE MOON IS WHIRLING INTO YOUR 2ND HOUSE OF MANIFESTATION.

SAGITTARIUS: LIFE IS BETTER LIVED TOGETHER. IT'S TIME TO GET EVERYONE TOGETHER AS THE MOON LEADS THE WAY INTO YOUR OUTGOING 11TH HOUSE, HIGHLIGHTING A CERTAIN SOCIAL VIBRATION IN THE STARS.

PISCES: THE MOON IS ENTERING YOUR ALL-OR-NOTHING 8TH HOUSE, SO YOU MAY FIND YOURSELF IN SITUATIONS THAT REQUIRE THE UTMOST SERIOUS COMMITMENT TO ACHIEVE YOUR AIMS, WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY ACKNOWLEDGING WHAT OTHERS WANT, AS WELL.

CARTOON

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Lahiru Milantha helps Janakpur Bolts defeat Sudurpaschim Royals in final



Janakpur Bolts' Lahiru Milantha raises his bat after a half-century against Sudurpachim Royals in the NPL final at TU Ground on Saturday.

PHOTO: BIKASH DWARIE/TN

BY NAYAK PAUDEL
Kathmandu, Dec. 21

LAHIRU MILANTHA WAS THE HERO OF THE GAME FOR JANAKPUR BOLTS IN THE TEAM'S VICTORY OVER SUDURPASCHIM ROYALS IN THE FINAL OF THE NEPAL PREMIER LEAGUE (NPL) ON SATURDAY.

MILANTHA, THE OPENER FOR JANAKPUR IN THE FINAL, SCORED HIS HIGHEST INDIVIDUAL SCORE OF THE TOURNAMENT IN THE FINAL AND WAS ADJUDGED THE PLAYER OF THE MATCH. FURTHERMORE, HIS 87 OFF 49 HELPED HIM CLIMB TO THE TOP OF THE LIST OF THE MOST RUN-SCORERS AT THE END OF THE NPL'S FIRST EDITION.

HE HAD NOT PERFORMED WELL AFTER STAYING NOT OUT AT 75 RUNS IN JANAKPUR'S FIRST GAME OF THE NPL AGAINST BIRATNAGAR KINGS ON NOVEMBER 30. HE HAD CROSSED THE 30-RUN-MARK ONLY ONE AFTER IT BEFORE PLAYING HIS MOST IMPORTANT INNING ON SATURDAY.

THE SRI LANKAN-BORN MILANTHA, WHO IS CURRENTLY PLAYING CRICKET IN THE USA, SCORED 293 RUNS IN 10 GAMES OUTPERFORMING RAVI BOPARA (286 RUNS IN 8 GAMES) AND ROHIT KUMAR PAUDEL (279 RUNS IN 7 GAMES).

JANAKPUR'S CHASE WAS OPENED BY MILANTHA WITH SKIPPER AASIF SHEIKH AND THE DUO GAVE THE TEAM THE START THEY REQUIRED IN THE FIRST POWERPLAY. WHEN AASIF DEPARTED IN THE FINAL BALL OF THE SEVENTH OVER, HE HAD ADDED 33 OFF 19 AND THE TEAM WAS AT 73 RUNS.

MILANTHA'S DEPARTURE CAME IN 15.3 OVERS WHEN HE WAS CAUGHT AND BOWLED BY SCOTT KUGGELEJN AS THE THIRD WICKET; HE WAS THEN PARTNERING WITH HARSH THAKER. MILANTHA WAS ONE DROPPED AT 65 OFF 36 IN 11.1 OVERS.

WHEN MILANTHA DEPARTED, JANAKPUR'S DUGOUT AND FANS WERE NOT HAVING ANY TROUBLE AS THEY BELIEVED THAT HE HAD TAKEN THE TEAM TO A GUARANTEED WIN.

JAMES NEESHAM COULD NOT DO ENOUGH IN THE FINAL WHEN HE CAME IN AFTER MILANTHA'S DEPARTURE. HOWEVER, HE WAS DELIGHTED TO WIN HIS FIRST CLUB TROPHY DESPITE PLAYING IN LEAGUES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

THAKER STAYED NOT OUT WITH MAYAN YADAV TO CHASE SUDURPASCHIM'S TARGET OF 185 RUNS WITH FOUR BALLS REMAINING.

ANIL KUMAR SAH, JANAKPUR'S SKIPPER

WHO WAS RESTED FROM QUALIFIER 1 FOLLOWING AN INJURY IN HIS HAND, WAS FOUND STATING THAT JANAKPUR WAS PREPARED TO CHASE OVER 200 RUNS.

JANAKPUR WOULD HAVE CHASED 185 RUNS SOONER BUT THE PLAN WAS FOILED AS SUDUR INCREASED PRESSURE WITH THE BALL IN THE FINAL OVERS. SUDUR HAD USED EIGHT BOWLERS IN THE DEFENCE.

NEVERTHELESS, JANAKPUR WAS ALSO NOT GOOD WITH THE BALL AS WELL. JANAKPUR HAD GIVEN 32 RUNS IN THE FIRST THREE OVERS BEFORE THAKER AND LALIT NARAYAN RAJBANSHI RESPONDED WITH A MAIDEN EACH IN THE FOURTH AND FIFTH OVERS RESPECTIVELY.

JANAKPUR COULD BE RELIEVED ONLY IN THE 12TH OVER WHEN SUDUR'S FIRST WICKET FELL IN THE FORM OF SAIF ZAIB. ZAIB, WHO WAS DROPPED AT 66 OFF 40, BUT ZAIB COULD ONLY ADD THREE MORE RUNS AND DEPARTED FOR 69 OFF 43.

ZAIB'S OPENING PARTNER BINOD BHANDARI ALSO PLAYED A DECENT KNOCK AS HE ADDED 41 OFF 31. BUT DESPITE A GREAT START, SUDUR'S BATTING ORDER CRUMBLED. NONE OF THE OTHER BATSMEN THAN THE OPENING PAIR SCORED OVER 15 RUNS FOLLOWING WHICH SUDUR COULD NOT REACH THE 200-RUN-MARK THAT SEEMED POSSIBLE IN THE BEGINNING.

KISHORE MAHATA AND MOHAMMAD MOHSIN BAGGED THREE WICKETS EACH FOR JANAKPUR WHILE NEESHAM AND RAJBANSHI TOOK ONE EACH.

Best performances

"WHO WILL WIN THE OMODA/JAECCO CUP?" WAS A MAJOR QUESTION NEPALI FANS HAD EVER SINCE THE NPL ANNOUNCED THE FOUR-WHEELER FOR THE BEST NEPALI PLAYER. THE FANS GOT THE ANSWER ON SATURDAY WHEN DIPENDRA SINGH AIRSE WAS DECLARED THE BEST NEPALI PLAYER OF THE NPL.

SIMILARLY, JANAKPUR'S LALIT NARAYN RAJBANSHI WAS ADJUDGED AS THE BEST BOWLER OF THE TOURNAMENT. HE WAS THE JOINT-HIGHEST WICKET-TAKER ALONGSIDE KUGGELEJN; RAJBANSHI BAGGED 17 WICKETS IN 10 GAMES AND HIS TEAM WON THE NPL.

ALSO, KARNALI YAKS' BIPIN SHARMA, THE 16-YEAR-OLD WHO TOOK THE WICKETS OF THE LINES OF MARTIN GUPTILL AND JAMES NEESHAM, WAS FETED AS THE EMERGING PLAYER OF THE TOURNAMENT AWARD. SHARMA WAS THE FIFTH LEADING WICKET-TAKER OF THE TOURNAMENT WITH 13 WICKETS IN 8 GAMES.

Usyk, Fury set for titanic rematch



FILE PHOTO: AFP

Usyk won by split-decision against Fury (right) in May.

AFP
Riyadh, Dec. 21

OLEKSANDR USYK AND TYSON FURY REPRISÉ THEIR HEAVY-WEIGHT "FIGHT OF THE CENTURY" ON SATURDAY WITH MULTIPLE TITLES AND BOTH FIGHTERS' PLACE IN HISTORY ON THE LINE.

USYK EDGED A SPLIT DECISION AT RIYADH'S KINGDOM ARENA IN MAY, HANDING FURY HIS SOLE DEFEAT AND BECOMING THE FIRST UNDISPUTED CHAMPION OF THE FOUR-BELT ERA.

THE UNBEATEN UKRAINIAN HAS EXHDED HIS TRADEMARK CALM BEFORE THE REMATCH WHILE THE NEWLY BEARDED FURY, ACHING FOR REVENGE, HAS VEERED BETWEEN MOODY SILENCE AND VERNACULAR THREATS.

USYK, 37, AND HIS 36-YEAR-OLD RIVAL WERE LOCKED IN AN INCREDIBLE 11-MINUTE FACE-OFF ON THURSDAY THAT ENDED WITH THE SWEATING FURY CURSING AND HURLING INSULTS.

MUCH LIKE THEIR ABSORBING DUEL SEVEN MONTHS AGO, THE FIRST HEAVYWEIGHT UNIFICATION FIGHT IN 25 YEARS, SATURDAY'S RETURN TO THE 22,000-SEAT VENUE IS DIFFICULT TO CALL.

USYK, FORMERLY AN OUTSTANDING AMATEUR AND AN OLYMPIC CHAMPION, IS 22-0 INCLUDING 14 KNOCK-OUTS AND WAS UNDISPUTED CRUISERWEIGHT CHAMPION BEFORE UNITING THE HEAVY-WEIGHT BELTS WITH SIX FIGHTS.

THE INTELLIGENT, MOBILE SOUTHPAW THROWS HIS ARRAY OF SHOTS WITH UNERRING ACCURACY, WHILE SUPREME FITNESS MAKES HIM NOTORIOUSLY DANGEROUS IN THE CLOSING ROUNDS.

ALTHOUGH THE SCORING WAS TIGHT IN MAY, HE HAD FURY IN SERIOUS TROUBLE IN THE NINTH WHEN THE BUCKLING BRITON TOOK A STANDING EIGHT COUNT BEFORE BEING SAVED BY THE REEL.

"GYPSY KING" FURY, HOWEVER, IS A NATURAL BOXER WITH THE INSTINCTIVE RING SMARTS OF A MAN WHO HAILS FROM GENERATIONS OF BARE-KNUCKLE CHAMPIONS.

THE 6FT 9INS (206CM) LANCASHIRE COMES IN AT 281 POUNDS (127.4KG) FULLY CLOTHED, THE HEAVIEST OF HIS CAREER, INDICATING INTENT TO DOMINATE A MAN WHO IS SIX INCHES SHORTER AND 55 POUNDS LIGHTER.

FURY ALSO BOASTS A STRONG

RECORD IN REMATCHES, AFTER PREVAILING CONVINCINGLY IN HIS TRILOGIES AGAINST DEREK CHISORA AND DEREK CHISORA.

"YOU CAN'T WRITE HIM OFF"

"IT'S A HARD ONE TO SAY BECAUSE IF I'M A BETTING MAN, I WOULD PICK OLEKSANDR USYK," DILLIAN WHYTE, WHO LOST TO FURY AT LONDON'S WEMBLEY IN APRIL 2022, TOLD SKY SPORTS.

"BUT I KNOW FROM HISTORY AND SEEING FURY FIGHT AND KNOWING HIS RESOLVE, AND BEING IN CAMP WITH HIM AND FOUGHT HIM AND SEEN THAT HE HAS ALWAYS BOUNCED BACK."

"IT'S HARD TO GO AGAINST HIM BECAUSE YOU CAN'T JUST WRITE HIM OFF. YOU THINK HE'S FINISHED, HE'S NOT GOING TO COME BACK, AND THEN HE JUST COMES BACK AND PRODUCES THE GOODS."

ONE QUESTION THAT HANGS OVER FURY (34-1-1) IS HIS CONDITIONING AFTER A PERSONAL LIFE THAT HAS TOUCHED THE DEPTHS OF ALCOHOLISM, SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND DEPRESSION.

CRIMEA'S USYK, MEANWHILE, IS A MODEL PROFESSIONAL AND COMES FIRED BY PATRIOTIC FERVOUR AS UKRAINE APPROACHES THREE YEARS SINCE THE RUSSIAN INVASION.

BY BEATING FURY, "THE CAT" JOINED THE LINES OF MUHAMMAD ALI, JOE LOUIS AND MIKE TYSON AS UNDISPUTED HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION, AND THE FIRST SINCE LENOX LEWIS IN 1999.

IF FURY, THE BOOKIES' SLIGHT UNDERDOG, BRINGS USYK'S REIGN TO AN END, HE WOULD BECOME ONLY THE SIXTH THREE-TIME HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION, A BRACKET THAT INCLUDES HALL-OF-FAMERS ALI, LEWIS AND VITALI KLITSCHKO, THE LAST MAN TO ACHIEVE THE FEAT IN 2008 AND NOW MAYOR OF KIEV.

ONLY THE WBA, WBO AND WBC BELTS ARE NOW ON THE LINE AFTER USYK, FOCUSED ON THE LUCRATIVE REMATCH, RELINQUISHED HIS IBF TITLE RATHER THAN FACE CHALLENGER DANIEL DUBOIS.

REPORTS PUT THE PRIZE PURSE AT AN INCREASED \$190 MILLION WITH USYK, AS DEFENDING CHAMPION, EXPECTED TO RECEIVE THE BIGGER SHARE — A REVERSAL OF FORTUNES FROM MAY.

THE FIGHT SITS HIGH IN THE PORTFOLIO OF SAUDI ARABIA'S OIL-FUNDED PUSH INTO SPORTS, WHICH HAS DRAWN ACCUSATIONS OF "SPORTSWASHING" ITS DUBIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD.

Soccer's top players have had enough, as FIFA's new super-sized tournament sparks a revolt

AP
Manchester, Dec. 21

ONE OF THE MOST STRIKING MOMENTS OF SOCCER IN 2024 WAS WHEN RODRI HORIBLED ONTO A STAGE IN PARIS ON CRUTCHES TO RECEIVE THE PRESTIGIOUS BALLON D'OR FOR BEST MALE PLAYER OF THE YEAR.

THE MANCHESTER CITY AND SPAIN MIDFIELDER HAD BEEN ONE OF THE MOST OUTSPOKEN CRITICS AGAINST THE INCREASINGLY CONGESTED SOCCER CALENDAR, WARNING THAT THE LACK OF DOWNTIME WAS DETRIMENTAL TO PLAYERS' PERFORMANCE AND HEALTH. THEN, JUST A MONTH BEFORE THE OCT. 28 AWARD CEREMONY, HE TORE HIS ACL DURING A SEEMINGLY ROUTINE RUN IN A PREMIER LEAGUE GAME AGAINST ARSENAL.

THOUGH SUCH INJURIES HAVE OCCURRED THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF THE SPORT AND AREN'T NECESSARILY LINKED TO OVERPLAYING, RODRI'S SEASON-ENDING INJURY BECAME A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE PHYSICAL TOLL OF MODERN SOCCER AT A TIME WHEN THE BUSY MATCH SCHEDULE IS FACING LEGAL CHALLENGES AND THE POSSIBILITY OF STRIKE ACTION.

TOP FOOTBALLERS ARE NOW ROUTINELY PLAYING MORE THAN 60 GAMES PER SEASON FOR CLUB AND COUNTRY, WHILE THE GAME IS GETTING FASTER AND MORE INTENSE. INJURIES ARE ON THE RISE. ALREADY PUSHED TO THEIR LIMITS, SOME PLAYERS SAY FIFA'S NEWLY EXPANDED CLUB WORLD CUP, TO BE HELD IN THE UNITED STATES NEXT YEAR, IS THE LAST STRAW.

PLAYERS SAY THEY ARE "AT BREAKING POINT, THAT THEY ARE AT THE LIMIT, THAT IT'S ACTUALLY TOO MUCH," ALEXANDER BIELEFELD, FROM GLOBAL PLAYERS' UNION FIFPRO, TOLD THE ASSOCIATED PRESS.

FIFA's new addition to the calendar

THE NEW CLUB WORLD CUP IS A SUPER-SIZED VERSION OF WHAT USED TO BE A SHORT TOURNAMENT WITH ONLY SEVEN TEAMS. THE NEW EDITION INCLUDES 32 TEAMS FROM AROUND THE WORLD AND WILL BE HELD EVERY FOUR YEARS, STARTING NEXT SUMMER IN THE UNITED STATES FROM JUNE 14 TO JULY 13. AS ITS NAME SUGGESTS, IT'S ENVISIONED TO BE CLUB VERSION OF THE WORLD CUP FOR NATIONAL TEAMS.

THAT MEANS TOP PLAYERS WILL HAVE A MONTHLONG TOURNAMENT ON TOP OF



FILE PHOTO: AP

FIFA President Gianni Infantino' speaks next to the trophy during the draw for the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup soccer tournament, Thursday, Dec. 5, 2024, in Miami.

THEIR DOMESTIC LEAGUE SEASON THREE OUT OF EVERY FOUR YEARS. WITH MORE GAMES ALSO ADDED TO THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE IN EUROPE THIS SEASON AS WELL AS THE NEXT WORLD CUP IN 2026, THE SOCCER CALENDAR IS FILLING UP QUICKLY.

"IT'S SOMETHING THAT WORRIES US BECAUSE WE ARE THE GUYS WHO SUFFER," RODRI SAID IN SEPTEMBER, JUST DAYS BEFORE HE WAS INJURED. HE SAID PLAYERS MAY HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO REFUSE TO PLAY IF THE TREND CONTINUES.

He's not the only one feeling frustrated.

IN A POST ON X LAST YEAR, RAPHAEL VARANE, A MEMBER OF FRANCE'S WORLD CUP WINNING SQUAD IN 2018, SAID THE SCHEDULE WAS PUTTING PLAYERS' PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING AT RISK.

"WHY ARE OUR OPINIONS NOT BEING HEARD?" ASKED THE 31-YEAR-OLD VARANE, WHO RETIRED FROM THE NATIONAL TEAM TWO YEARS AGO AND FROM PLAYING ALTOGETHER IN SEPTEMBER THIS YEAR FOLLOWING AN INJURY.

IN JULY, ENGLAND AND REAL MADRID MIDFIELDER JUDE BELLINGHAM DESCRIBED THE SCHEDULE AS "CRAZY."

"IT'S DIFFICULT ON THE BODY — MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY YOU ARE EXHAUSTED," HE SAID AFTER ENGLAND

WAS RUNNER-UP AT THE EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP.

FIFPRO SAYS A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF PLAYERS ROUTINELY PLAY 60-70 MATCHES A SEASON. THE UNION'S RECOMMENDED LIMIT IS 55.

LAST SEASON JULIAN ALVAREZ PLAYED 75 GAMES FOR FORMER CLUB MANCHESTER CITY AND ARGENTINA IN 10 DIFFERENT COMPETITIONS SPANNING THE PREMIER LEAGUE, CHAMPIONS LEAGUE, COPA AMERICA AND OLYMPICS.

THE SEASON BEFORE, MANCHESTER UNITED MIDFIELDER BRUNO FERNANDES PLAYED 70 TIMES, INCLUDING A RUN OF 20 CONSECUTIVE GAMES.

Injuries are a growing concern

THE MEN'S EUROPEAN FOOTBALL INJURY INDEX, AN ANNUAL REPORT BY GLOBAL INSURANCE BROKER HOWDEN, FOUND THERE WERE 4,123 INJURIES IN THE TOP DIVISIONS OF ENGLAND, SPAIN, GERMANY, ITALY AND FRANCE LAST SEASON. IT SAID THE NUMBER OF INJURIES HAD RISEN YEAR-ON-YEAR SINCE THE INDEX WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN 2021 AND THAT "IT WOULD BE FAIR TO EXPECT A CONTINUATION OF THIS UPWARDS TRAJECTORY."

TONY STRUDWICK, MEDICAL DIRECTOR FOR WEST BROMWICH ALBION AND FORMER HEAD OF PERFORMANCE FOR

MANCHESTER UNITED, SAID INJURIES ARE ON THE RISE DESPITE ADVANCEMENTS IN SPORTS SCIENCE AND MEDICINE.

"THAT TO ME LOOKS LIKE THERE'S A MISMATCH BETWEEN WHAT THE PLAYERS CAN PHYSICALLY TOLERATE AND WHAT THEY'VE BEEN EXPOSED TO," HE TOLD THE AP. "DURING THE LAST EIGHT SEASONS, INCIDENTS OF HAMSTRING INJURIES, IN PARTICULAR, HAVE INCREASED."

STRUDWICK SAID THE RISK OF TOO MANY GAMES WAS ULTIMATELY INJURY AND BURNOUT. BUT HE SAID PLAYERS ARE UNLIKELY TO RAISE THE ISSUE WITH THEIR CLUBS OR NATIONAL TEAMS.

"PLAYERS ARE VERY RELUCTANT TO SAY THEY DON'T WANT TO PLAY AND THEY'RE VERY, VERY TIRED. IT TAKES A RELATIVELY BRAVE PERSON TO DO THAT," HE SAID.

MANCHESTER CITY PLAYED 61 GAMES IN THE 2022-23 CAMPAIGN WHEN IT WON A TROPHY TREBLE OF THE PREMIER LEAGUE, CHAMPIONS LEAGUE AND FA CUP.

THIS SEASON THAT NUMBER COULD RISE TO 71 BECAUSE OF AN EXPANDED GROUP STAGE AND POTENTIAL PLAYOFF IN THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE AND THE CLUB WORLD CUP.

A HEAVY WORKLOAD IS ALSO AN ISSUE IN WOMEN'S SOCCER, FIFPRO SAID EARLIER THIS WEEK, THOUGH IT

NOTED THAT WHILE SOME TOP PLAYERS HAVE A PACKED SCHEDULE, OTHERS DON'T GET TO PLAY ENOUGH.

FIFA hits back at its critics

IF SUCCESSFUL, THE CLUB WORLD CUP COULD RIVAL THE PREMIER LEAGUE AND CHAMPIONS LEAGUE AS ONE OF THE MOST LUCRATIVE AND WATCHED TOURNAMENTS IN CLUB SOCCER. IT HAS BEEN BACKED BY CLUBS AND NEXT YEAR'S EVENT IS SET TO FEATURE MANY OF THE BIGGEST NAMES IN THE SPORT, INCLUDING LIONEL MESSI, NEYMAR, KYLIAN MBAPPE AND VINICIUS JR.

COMING AT THE END OF MANY LEAGUES' REGULAR SEASON, FIFA SAID THE DATES WOULD BE "HARMONIOUSLY ALIGNED WITH THE INTERNATIONAL MATCH CALENDAR" TO ENSURE SUFFICIENT REST FOR PLAYERS AHEAD OF THE START OF DOMESTIC CAMPAIGNS.

THE GOVERNING BODY HAS ALSO SET UP A PLAYER WELFARE TASK FORCE TO BE LED BY FORMER ARSENAL MANAGER ARSENE WENGER.

FIFPRO, WHICH SAYS IT REPRESENTS MORE THAN 66,000 PLAYERS AROUND THE WORLD, IS NOT CONVINCED. IN OCTOBER, ITS EUROPEAN DIVISION TEAMED UP WITH DOMESTIC LEAGUES AND FILED A LEGAL COMPLAINT IN EUROPE AGAINST HOW FIFA ADDS NEW AND BIGGER MEN'S COMPETITIONS TO THE CALENDAR.

FIFA HIT BACK, NOTING THAT EUROPEAN CLUBS OFTEN FILL THEIR SUMMER BREAKS WITH EXHIBITION MATCHES AROUND THE WORLD. IT ACCUSED SOME EUROPEAN LEAGUES OF ACTING WITH "HYPOCRISY, AND WITHOUT CONSIDERATION TO EVERYONE ELSE IN THE WORLD."

GELSON FERNANDES, A SWISS FORMER PLAYER WHO NOW WORKS FOR FIFA WITH THE TITLE DIRECTOR MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS AFRICA, SAID THAT CALENDAR CONGESTION IS AN ISSUE ONLY FOR A LIMITED NUMBER OF PLAYERS WHO CONSISTENTLY GO DEEP INTO TOURNAMENTS WITH THEIR CLUBS AND COUNTRIES. RODRI, WHO WON EURO 2024 WITH SPAIN THIS YEAR, AND ALVAREZ, WHO HELPED ARGENTINA TRIUMPH AT THE LAST WORLD CUP, ARE TWO SUCH HIGH-PROFILE EXAMPLES.

"SO, IT'S A SMALL GROUP OF PLAYERS, THAT MINIMUM PERCENTAGE OF THEM, WHICH ARE AFFECTED," FERNANDES TOLD THE AP. "AND I DON'T THINK WE SHOULD STOP A COMPETITION WHICH WILL GIVE DREAMS AND HOPES TO MILLIONS AND BILLIONS OF PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD FOR THAT."